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THE FAVOUR
OF THE KING

HAWTHORNE DANIEL





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THE KING**

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*He held out his hand, and she slipped a gold ring . . .
on to his finger*

IN THE FAVOUR OF THE KING

BY
HAWTHORNE DANIEL

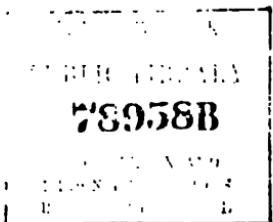


FRONTISPICE
BY
GORDON STEVENSON

V.C.

GARDEN CITY, N. Y., AND TORONTO
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY

1922
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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES
AT
THE COUNTRY LIFE PRESS, GARDEN CITY, N. Y.

First Edition

JUL

Λ

TO
MY MOTHER

—
JULY 1913



**IN THE FAVOUR OF
THE KING**

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had not yet put in their appearance, and to the youths of Spain the whole New World seemed to glitter with the possibilities of wealth and adventure.

The young man by the balustrade sheathed his rapier, and, drawing his cape more closely about him, turned and leaned against the stone. His form stood silhouetted sharply in the moonlight, and, as he leaned with his elbows on the balustrade, the least suggestion of a breeze whispered faintly through a rose bush, and lightly touched his hair. The breeze faded away, and breathing again moved the tip of the ostrich plume that decorated the hat beside him.

In the valley below the garden lay Toledo, pale and quiet in the Spanish moonlight, with scarce a sound rising from it save the occasional bark of a dog in the narrow streets. Here and there a lighted window showed its orange square in the blackness of some shadowed wall, and as the moon rose higher, light after light disappeared until the whole city slept—seemingly deserted—quiet and at peace.

So deep was the young man in his own meditations, or so greatly had the spell of the moonlit city forced itself upon him, that he did not hear the almost noiseless step of another man as he approached across the grass. It was not until the newcomer's foot had struck the gravel of the path that the young man turned. Immediately he



kneeled and with bowed head awaited the approaching figure.

"Arise, Francisco," commanded the new arrival, in a tired voice, as he approached the balustrade and stopped. "Kneel not to me to-night. I am weary of being Charles the Fifth. For once I would be just a man."

The young man rose, and stood with slightly stooped head, in an attitude of silent deference.

"Nay, nay," continued the king. "Play not at being the courtier, I came to the garden to be rid of them, and so I came alone. Now if you play the part, I shall send you off to bed."

"At your order, Sire, I might be sent to bed," replied the youth, "but my mood is such that sleep will be an unlikely visitor."

"What now?" asked the king. "A love affair with some sweet maid who will have naught of you?"

"Nay, Your Majesty. 'Tis rather more serious than that."

"More serious than unrequited love to a man of one and twenty? Not so. It cannot be. But tell me what it is."

"It is the repetition of a story with which Your Majesty is already familiar," replied the young man, bowing his head and digging with his toe into the gravel of the path.

"The gaming table again?"

"Yes, Your Majesty," answered Francisco, "but with results even worse than the last time."

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"How worse?" asked the king. "You lost your all, as I recall it."

"All save the little estate my mother left to me in Salamanca," replied the young man. "This time, that, too, has gone. And further—a debt of honour for an amount which in itself is not exactly inconsiderable."

"Ah, boy," said the king, shaking his head. "How often have I warned you? And do you recall the import of the counsel that I gave you the last time that this happened?"

"Only too well, Your Majesty."

"Then what would you have me do?" questioned the king.

"Naught Sire," replied Francisco. "Your Majesty has aided me before, but I well remember the warning that was given to me the last time. I have no favour to ask. But, having nothing, I must leave the court. 'Tis no place for a poor man, and there are many places where a sword may win a fortune." He laid his hand affectionately upon his sword-hilt. "I'm glad I still retain my sword."

The king did not reply. Together they stood, gazing down upon Toledo. A thin cloud slid across the moon, dimming the scene, and, passing, bathed the city once more in the pale, cool light. A hurrying rider galloped over the cobble stones of a street far off, and the clatter of the horse's hoofs rose faintly to the garden. A bat flew silently from among the trees, flitted for a moment above

their heads, and disappeared as silently as it had come. A cricket in the grass chirped loudly. At last the king spoke.

"Ah, boy," he said, and the cricket stopped its chirping as if frightened at the sound of the voice. "I would that I were you."

Francisco looked up inquiringly, and as if in answer to his unspoken query the king continued.

"What you have lost is little, and I am tempted to make it good to you, as I did before. But should I do so I fear that you might lose something of far greater value—your interest in accomplishment. Furthermore I swore that I would never make good another gambling debt of yours, and so I told you. You remember?"

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"But a little gold and an estate or two are not all there is worth having," continued the king. "Your youth, your sword, and the great New World! Ah, there is a trinity that might readily be made to spell Opportunity."

Francisco looked up, his eyes flashing.

"Your Majesty," he cried. "It is to the New World that I wish to go. I am not fitted for this courtier's life of ease. The wine, the bright eyes of the women, the gambling—all this aimless life but unfits me for that which I do best. My sword is my companion, and here there is no work for it to do. Your Majesty, I beg of you, grant me permission to leave Toledo, that I may join some

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company of adventurers and sail to the conquered land of the Aztecs, there to enter my sword in some adventure in the Great Unknown."

The king did not immediately reply, but instead gazed seriously at the young man, noting the enthusiasm, the flashing eyes. He put his hand to his chin and rubbed his beard.

"Francisco," he said at last. "Since you were but a little child you have been a member of my household, and I have treated you as one of my own blood, for your father gave his life to save mine. I have never forgotten him, and what I do now he would not disapprove. I will not pay your debts, but this I will do. I will permit you to go to Mexico, and if you prove yourself a son worthy of your sire, you shall not go unrewarded. And further—I shall make your way a little easier.

"I have but recently received a request from Antonio de Mendoza, the Viceroy of New Spain, asking that I send a man to him who shall be governor of one of the provinces of Mexico—New Galicia. The duties will not be many, and this land lies at the very edge of the Great Unknown. Come to me to-morrow, and I shall give you your appointment. Three weeks hence a ship sails from Seville on which you will take passage with your baggage and attendants."

Francisco had stood with burning cheeks, with loudly beating heart. When the king had finished speaking the young man was trembling with eager

gratitude. He made an effort to speak, but his heart seemed to fill his throat, and he could not. His eyes filled with tears, and he dropped on his knee to hide them as they burst their confines and rolled slowly down his cheeks.

The king placed his hand on the younger man's head, and held it there for a moment.

"Ah, Francisco," he said, "I wish that I, too, might go. But I must stay behind, for I am king."

He turned and strode back across the garden, and Francisco, still kneeling, heard his footsteps as they softly fell upon the grass until he turned into an alley of roses and disappeared.

Slowly the young man rose to his feet, and, turning, he leaned again upon the balustrade, gazing down upon Toledo, which lay more quiet, more peaceful than before.

"Francisco Vasquez de Coronado," he said aloud, "Governor of New Galicia! Oh, Toledo," he continued, whispering to the sleeping city, "the Land of Adventure is open for me at last!"

CHAPTER II

ARÉ the horses ready, Pedro?" asked Coronado, as he came out into the brilliant Mexican sunlight in the courtyard of the inn at Vera Cruz.

"Yes, Your Excellency," replied the man, "they are waiting."

"How long are we to be upon the road?" queried Coronado.

"I am told that if Your Excellency is willing to ride hard and leave the pack horses to take their time, we should be able to sleep Thursday night in the Viceroy's mansion in Mexico City," replied the man.

"And to-day is Monday," muttered Coronado. "Very well," he continued aloud. "Thursday night in Mexico City. Call the others, Pedro, and let us start. I am anxious to be gone."

"Yes, Your Excellency."

The man disappeared through the doorway into which the early morning sun cast an exploring beam, and Coronado wandered out to gaze down toward the beach, and beyond it to the warm blue waters of the Gulf where lay the *Santa Marta*, still engaged in handing goods that were to be despatched to Mexico City.

Vera Cruz had been founded but twenty years before, when Cortes had used it as his base for the operations that ended in the conquest of Mexico. But even for its youth the town was undeveloped. A few structures built by the Spaniards—the inn, a fort, some warehouses—and that was all. And in the offing lay the *Santa Marta* unloading her bales and boxes into small boats that plied back and forth from the beach. Blue water, yellow sand, dull buildings, dark green vegetation—and over all the brilliant sunlight, that sparkled on the waves and flashed from the wet oars of the rowers in the small boats—that glinted in the foam along the beach and turned the yellow sand almost to gold.

"Is Your Excellency homesick," asked a voice from behind Coronado, "that he gazes so sadly out to sea?"

"Nay, Carlos," replied Coronado, without turning. "I am but awaiting the lazy members of my suite that we may set out for the city on the lake."

"Then wait no longer," replied Carlos, "for the lazy ones are ready. Let us go."

* * * * *

For three days the trail led uphill. Gradually the little party climbed. Through Tlascala, the natives of which had held out against the Aztecs and had defied Cortes, only to become his allies when they realized the strength of the little band

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of newcomers. Through Cholula where the Spaniards had killed so many of the populace when they had attempted treacherously to massacre the little command. Up hill further, until finally, early Thursday morning they reached the crest, and gazed down upon the valley in which lay Mexico City—Tenochtitlan, the city on the lake.

The sun shone through the clear air, spreading over the scene a film of radiance. Close beside the party the trees and bushes cast black shadows on the slope. Down the valley little cultivated fields dotted the un-tilled ground. A hut half hidden by its sheltering trees, stood timidly beside the trail. In the distance the detail melted into a vast and beautiful garden, with woods and fields to take the place of flowers and ferns. A stream, a little silver ribbon, showed here and there as it pursued its way, and far down in the valley lay the lake—a spot of liquid sunlight that shone in bright relief amid the green of the surrounding country, while beyond rose the mountains—the distance-softened mountains—that marked the far horizon.

The party stopped to view the scene that lay before them. A rabbit scurried from the underbrush and darted down the trail, its white tail bobbing up and down as it sped along the way. Frightened by the rabbit a covey of quail broke cover and whirred off into the brush, to disappear as suddenly as they had come. An owl, bewildered by the bright sunlight, sat on the limb of a tree near the

road, and surveyed the party, blinking wisely. High in the sky above, a vulture wheeled, circling slowly on motionless wings, and gazing coldly down, heeding nothing of the life that seemed below, but instead, waiting, patiently waiting, not to see the living, but the dead.

"What a marvelous valley," said Coronado at last. "I have never seen its equal."

"Nor I," replied Carlos, "but unless we move on we shall risk missing a meal this evening with the Viceroy, who has, I am told, a delightful mansion, and in addition, a beautiful daughter. What do you say to sending Pedro on ahead to let them know that we are coming?"

"An excellent idea," replied Coronado. "Pedro," he said, turning to his follower. "Can you be dignified enough to bear word to His Excellency the Viceroy that we are coming, and hope to reach his palace by early evening?"

"I can try, Your Excellency," replied the big, good-natured fellow. "And I believe that I can properly inform His Excellency as to what he may expect."

"Get you gone, then," replied his master, "and inform the Viceroy that we are coming and when we shall arrive."

"Yes, Excellency," answered Pedro, bowing.

The man bowed over his saddle bow, swept off his hat in salute, wheeled his horse and galloped off.

"And we must follow," continued Coronado,

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"else two gentlemen, by name Carlos and Francisco, together with their serving men and horses may go hungry after all."

The little party started forward, and dropped farther and farther down into the valley. The sun rose slowly to the zenith and as slowly sank toward the west, throwing long shadows across the trail. The wild life in the woods scurried about, sometimes seen, sometimes only heard, and most often lost to both sight and hearing.

The sun sank lower still, touching the clouds in the western sky with gold, as the party rode out on to the plain across which lay the city on the lake. The sky changed from gold to pink, from pink to rose, from rose to fiery red, and through the broken clouds shot brilliant rays, which reach a hill top here, a hill top there, and finally touched the lake, only to burst into a dazzling light that sparkled red and gold and red again, and faded as the sunset did, to leave the world in twilight—all in gray.

The little party advanced across the plain, and reached the lake. On to a causeway they rode, and trotted along it, half a mile or more. They thundered across a drawbridge, and were told by the guide that it was there that the gallant Alvarado made his mighty leap after defending the crossing for the men, vaulting the open way with the aid of his pikestaff when Cortes's little army was retreating from the city through the countless thousands of the surrounding Aztecs.

On they rode, into the city, and along a street lined with reconstructed buildings, built since the destruction of the city by the Conqueror. Out of the street and across an open square they rode, and up to the gate of the Viceroy's mansion.

Torches were fixed to light the place, for dusk was fading into evening, and a guard was awaiting them. An officer saluted, bowing and sweeping off his hat. Soldiers stood at attention, and the party rode into the courtyard, where more attendants awaited.

They dismounted, turned their horses over to the waiting stable boys, and were led by an attendant up the steps and into the mansion. Another attendant received them, and bowing, told them that the Viceroy had been informed of their coming, and that he would take pleasure in receiving them when they had gone to their rooms and had removed the stains of travel.

They were led through a long passage, up a flight of stairs, and into a suite of rooms.

"These chambers will be for your use," remarked their guide, "and I shall take the liberty of sending your servants up at once with your belongings. If it is not inconvenient for you, the Viceroy will see you in an hour."

Bowing, the man retired, closing the door behind him.

Coronado looked at his companion in amazement.

"It would seem," he said, "that we are about to attend a function."

"Yes," replied Carlos, "and our baggage will not be here until to-morrow at the earliest. What sort of an appearance shall we make?"

"Vanity," said Coronado, laughing. "Why should you care how you look in this wild country? One would think that you were about to meet some of the ladies of the court."

"Did I not tell you," answered Carlos with a serious expression on his face, "that the Viceroy has a daughter?"

"Ah, well," laughed Coronado, "I think that you will be taken care of. I fortunately told the lackeys to bring a chest for each of us, containing some presentable clothes. I suppose that they will be sent to us. If I'm not mistaken they are here now."

Someone knocked at the door as he spoke, and when it opened there appeared two men, each with a chest, and behind them came several other attendants.

An hour later and the two were surveying each other with critical eyes.

"Never before have I seen you dressed so well," remarked Carlos, as he inspected his friend. "The colour you have developed since we left Toledo improves your looks."

"And you," laughed Coronado, "look more the man than ever you looked before. Let us go and

see what sort of an affair this is at which we are expected."

Outside the door an attendant was waiting, who bowed when they appeared.

"With Your Excellencies' permission," he said, "I shall lead the way."

"Lead on," laughed Carlos, "but tell us whither we are bound."

"I have been instructed," replied the man, "to lead you to Fray Juan, the priest who is His Excellency's advisor and the instructor of his daughter. The worthy padre is awaiting with Señor Gorgoza, the head of His Excellency's military and police, in order to present Your Excellencies to the Viceroy."

They followed down the stairs and met the priest and officer in the hall.

"Your Excellencies are welcome to Mexico City," said Fray Juan in greeting. "It is a pleasure to receive visitors fresh from Spain and from the court, and one that comes but seldom to those of us who have lived long in this distant land."

"It is a pleasure," replied Francisco, "to be so courteously received. Both Don Carlos and I feel deeply grateful for your kind words."

"His Excellency, the Viceroy," returned the priest, "is waiting in his study. With him also are his daughter, Señorita Dolores; her friend and companion, Señorita Isabella Guzman; and Señora de Estrada, their duenna, all of whom are more than anxious to make you welcome."

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“We are at your service,” said Francisco.

“Then let us go,” suggested the priest, and accompanied by Francisco and followed by Señor Gorgoza and Carlos, he led the way across the anteroom and through the open door to the gayety and laughter of the brilliantly lighted study.

CHAPTER III

ON A morning about two weeks after the arrival of Francisco and Carlos, Fray Juan went as usual to the little room in which Dolores and Isabella were wont to show, for an hour or more, an intermittent interest in the studies that were assigned to them by the priest. Usually he arrived before the girls saw fit to come, but this morning they were ahead of him, and when he opened the door they stopped what had, apparently, been a very interesting conversation, and one not touching on the lessons that had been assigned them for the day.

"Buenas dias," said the priest.

"Buenas dias, Padre," replied the girls in the same breath.

"Have you studied your Latin for to-day?" asked the priest.

For a moment neither girl replied, and then Dolores, glancing up at the priest, and quickly dropping her eyes, fingered the leaves of a volume she held.

"Padre," she said finally, "we didn't have time even to look at it."

"No time!" returned the priest in surprise.

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"Surely all of yesterday afternoon and evening was time enough to translate a dozen lines of simple Latin."

Isabella's cheeks flushed crimson, and Dolores hesitated before she spoke.

"But Padre," she replied, finally, looking up at him with a frown of perplexity. "So many things happened yesterday that we just couldn't study."

The priest controlled a smile, and with a serious mien frowned slightly.

"What things?" he asked.

For a moment Dolores hesitated, and finally, throwing caution to the winds, she leaped to her feet and caught him by the arm. She stood close to him and looking up at his gaunt features she started to explain.

"It was this way," she began. "Isabella and I put our studies off until the middle of the afternoon, and then we escaped from Señora de Estrada and went out into the garden to study in the arbor. We had hardly started when Don Francisco and Don Carlos came down the path and—and——"

The priest was almost ready to break into laughter, but he frowned and said seriously, "Yes. And what?"

The girl tilted her head slightly to one side and tapping her toe lightly on the floor she looked down at the crucifix she was holding in her hand.

"Oh, Padre," she cried at last. "You don't help

at all. Is it so terrible that they should come out into the garden to see us?"

The serious expression vanished from the priest's face, and he chuckled.

"My dear," he replied. "It not only isn't terrible—it is the most natural thing in the world. But is that all?"

For a moment Dolores hesitated to reply, and finally she glanced at Isabella, who had remained seated in the corner, silent and scarlet. Isabella, glancing up just in time to catch the look, shook her head in a silent but energetic negative, frowning as she did so. Dolores' eyes twinkled mischievously, and she turned to the priest.

"Well, nearly all," she said, at last.

"Am I to be told the rest?" asked Juan.

Again the girl hesitated, and looked down again at the pendant of her necklace.

"There isn't much more," she said at last, "so I suppose that you might as well know. You see, Don Francisco and I left Isabella——"

"Dolores!" cried Isabella, jumping to her feet. She stood for a moment looking at the pair who stood in front of her, red to the roots of her hair. Then she darted across the room and out the door, running down the passage to her own room, where she bolted the door behind her and threw herself on her bed only to burst into a flood of angry tears that lasted until she calmed herself by reviewing the preceding afternoon, when she had sat in the

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arbor with Carlos, talking most casual nothings and yet thrilled through by his proximity.

Dolores, in the meantime, told the whole story to Fray Juan.

"Don Francisco and I left Isabella with Don Carlos," she said, "and went to sit on the stone bench under the big rose bush. We talked until nearly dark, and before we went back to the arbor he asked if he could meet me there again this afternoon. I told him that I didn't know." She paused for a moment. Then she glanced up at the priest.

"Was yesterday the first time that you met them there?" asked Juan.

"No-o-o," she replied glancing up at him, "but it was the first time that he asked me to come purposely to meet him."

"The other meetings were all accidental?" questioned Juan.

She hesitated. "Well," she said at last. "We went out there, but we didn't really know that they were coming."

"Does Señora de Estrada know of this?"

"We haven't told her, but——"

She stopped, and looked at him with a troubled little frown.

"Would it be wrong if I went?" she asked, suddenly.

The priest placed his great hairy hand on the girl's shoulder.

"It would not be wrong," he said at last.

"But—but how can I let him know?" she asked, her voice quivering.

The priest smiled, and dropped his hand.

"Don't worry," he said finally. "I'll find a way to let him know."

"And I'll tell Isabella to wait in the arbor," she whispered, stand on tiptoe.

The big priest smiled again, and Dolores, suddenly panicstricken at thought of her temerity, fled and barricaded herself in her room.

Fray Juan gazed for a moment at the floor, and frowned. He paced the length of the room and back, his hands clasped behind him, his head drooped. Finally he stopped, threw back his head, dismissed the frown, and opening the door, walked rapidly down the hall, his sandaled feet clapping gently on the bare tiles. Walking more sedately down the stairs he crossed the lower hall and passed out the door into the courtyard.

"Pedro," he called, as he saw that worthy leading a horse toward the gate. The man stopped, looking around to see who had called, and the priest approached him.

"Can you tell me," he asked, "where I can find His Excellency, your master?"

"I am but now taking his horse to him," replied the man. "He is awaiting Señor Gorgoza, with whom he and Don Carlos are to ride."

"Then let us go to him," returned the priest.

The two crossed the courtyard to the gate be-

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side which, in the shade, stood Francisco and Carlos, waiting for Gorgoza, near the door leading to the guard room.

“Good morning, Padre,” said Francisco, as the priest approached. “I hope this beautiful day finds you well and happy.”

“I return your greeting,” replied Juan, “and I pray that Heaven’s blessing may fall upon you.”

“I would that you would pray the same for me,” remarked Carlos, with an exaggerated expression of humility on his face, “for truly I am in as much need of it as he.”

The priest laughed.

“We all of us stand greatly in need of it,” he replied, “and indeed, I do wish it for you both. But tell me, you are riding to-day?”

“Yes, Padre,” answered Francisco. “Señor Gorgoza is to take us out to his prison camp, in order that we may learn how criminals are handled in this new country.”

The priest frowned.

“An unpleasant place,” he said. “Would that some better way of handling the question could be found. It seems to me that more leniency would do much to make the natives more friendly.”

“You think, then,” returned Francisco, alert to hear the priest’s point of view, “that they are handled too harshly?”

“I am sure of it,” replied Juan. “But that is not what I came to speak to you about.”

He glanced around to see that no one was within earshot. Pedro had tied Francisco's horse to an iron ring in the stone wall, and had gone to bring his own mount. Carlos' man was busy, half a stone's throw distant, looking at the feet of his master's horse, and the half dozen soldiers loitering about the place were burnishing their arms in the shade on the farther side of the courtyard. Juan's back was to the door that led to the guard room, and he failed to hear a step on the stone floor within. Satisfied that no one was near he spoke.

"The arbor and the old stone seat beneath the rose bush will each accommodate a fair young visitor this afternoon," he said.

The footsteps within the guard room ceased and not a sound came from within.

"It would not be well," continued the priest, "if they were kept waiting overlong."

Both Carlos and Francisco stepped closer to the priest.

"What do you mean?" demanded Francisco eagerly.

"That both of you," returned the priest, "are expected in the garden this afternoon at the same hour that you came yesterday."

The step in the guard room sounded at the door, and Gorgoza appeared. He glanced sharply at the trio, his eyes narrowed, his thin lips pressed together, but wreathed his face in a smile when they glanced up at him.

"A thousand apologies," he said deferentially, "for having kept you waiting. But I see that you have had good company—" he bowed toward Fray Juan—"to help you spend the time."

"The wait was nothing," replied Francisco. "Are you ready?"

"Yes," replied the officer. "All ready. Let us to horse."

Their attendants led the animals to the gate, and one by one they mounted, clattering through the arch, followed by their men. They crossed the plaza, riding three abreast, and disappeared into a street leading to the causeway across the lake, unconscious that they were watched by two pair of pretty eyes from a latticed window of the mansion. They crossed the causeway, and turned to the north along the shore of the lake, following it for a mile or more before, at last, they turned off along a road that led away from the water, winding through a heavy growth of trees and underbrush. The road led gradually uphill, and after an arduous climb the party reached a group of rude structures situated at the edge of a stone quarry. Gorgoza led the way among the huts, and stopped at last before the largest. A guard, who had been sitting half asleep in the shade beside the door leaped to his feet as he heard the clatter of the horses' hoofs, and was standing stiffly in his most soldierly attitude when the horsemen rounded the corner of the building.

"Where is the overseer?" demanded Gorgoza of the guard.

"He has gone to the quarry, Señor," replied the man, motioning in the direction of the pit from which arose the sound of striking hammers, and the strident call of voices.

"Then let us dismount," suggested Gorgoza turning to his companions, "and seek him there."

Leaving their horses with their attendants the three set off on foot, and reaching the edge of the quarry beheld below them, working in the glaring sun, a hundred or more perspiring native prisoners, with many armed guards interspersed among them. Some were cutting blocks of stone from the sides of the quarry. Some were moving newly cut slabs out into the open. Some were endeavoring to haul a great block up the incline which led at the farther side of the pit to the level on which the observers were standing. Perhaps a score of natives were clustered about the stone, pushing, pulling, sliding rollers under its slowly moving bulk—urging it inch by inch up the incline. The beads of sweat stood out on every strained face, and rivulets of sweat had washed furrows through the grime on every glistening body. Slowly the block progressed up the steep path, as with each united effort the straining group about it spent their strength. Three great muscular natives stood with their backs braced against the stone, to prevent its slipping back after each forward move. Each of the three was larger

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than the average Aztec, and the muscles of their arms and legs stood out in knots as they strained to hold the gains they made. Effort after effort succeeded in raising the stone almost to the rim of the pit when one of the three slipped on a loose pebble. His foot kicked against that of the man beside him, and the two lost their grip on the slab, leaving the third man alone to support its weight. The muscles seemed to start from his body as he put forth every ounce of his strength against the block. Slowly it bore him back, and before the two could recover themselves it had rolled down on him. His foot was caught beneath the irresistible stone, and he was thrown beneath the advancing mass. He screamed in hopeless agony as the granite crushed his leg, and gathering speed rolled over his prostrate body. Swiftly and more swiftly it sped down the slope leaving behind it the mangled and unrecognizable remains of the native. It rolled to the edge of the incline, and breaking away the fringe of supporting stone plunged over the wall. A shout from the natives on the incline warned a group working below of their danger, but the plunging stone gave them no time to escape. It struck with tremendous force, shaking the ground with the force of its impact, crushing two prisoners and spattering gouts of blood on to the others who stood near.

Horrified by the accident, both Francisco and Carlos cried out in pity. Not so Gorgoza. His

face went white with anger, and turning to his companions he bowed.

"Pardon me, señors," he said, "I must punish the man responsible for this accident."

Without waiting for an answer he walked rapidly around the pit to the upper end of the incline.

"Seize that man," he ordered, pointing to the prisoner whose foot had slipped beneath the load. "Seize him and bring him to me!"

The guard who had been in charge of the group grasped the native roughly, and dragged him before Gorgoza.

"Take him to the edge and cast him in," he commanded.

The guard hesitated.

"Cast him over the edge, I say," ordered Gorgoza again. "Over the edge."

The guard dragged the man to the brink. Unable to understand Spanish he had failed to comprehend. Now it dawned on him what he had to face, and he drew back. The resistance stiffened the guard's determination, and the native was dragged closer to his death.

Francisco and Carlos had been watching the scene from across the pit. Not able to hear Gorgoza's orders they were at first unable to understand his actions. But the man's determined resistance gave them an idea of what Gorgoza's words had been.

"You must not!" shouted Francisco, now keenly

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aware of the native's danger, and Carlos, quicker in action than in word, bounded forward in an effort to reach the threatened man before he could be pushed into the quarry.

But Gorgoza was not to be outdone. He stepped forward before Carlos had covered half the distance and grasping the native by the arm helped the guard to drag him to the edge. The native struggled in vain. Borne toward the edge by the two Spaniards he was thrown at last over the brink. Down, down he fell, his arms and legs spread wide as if reaching for help, his body turning slowly till he struck the rocks below.

Drawn by the horror of it Francisco looked over the edge. For a moment the man lay where he had fallen, his legs and arms strangely contorted. Then the twisted form quivered, and the head raised, and staring balefully, the Indian gazed up at Gorgoza as he stood looking cynically down. One long menacing stare, the Indian gave. Then his head fell back, his body twitched, and he lay still upon the stones.

Gorgoza turned away from the pit, and glanced carelessly up, as Carlos reached the spot. He brushed his hands together as if cleaning them of dust. "A disagreeable duty," he said. "Come," he continued, "now I can show you the work we are doing here."

"It is necessary for Don Francisco and me to return to the city," replied Carlos, coldly.

"An appointment, I suppose," returned Gorgoza, "with—" he hesitated insinuatingly—"the Viceroy." He bowed. "I am sorry," he continued, "that I shall not be able to accompany you. I must stay and get this place in order again. *Adios, Señor.*"

Without a word Carlos turned and, meeting Francisco, they walked back to their horses. They mounted, and rode silently toward the city, crossing the causeway, and trotting along the street and across the square. They clattered through the gate and dismounted, turning their horses over to their men, and walking silently into the mansion and up the stairs to their own apartments.

"I understand now," remarked Carlos, as the door closed behind them, "why Fray Juan thinks the prison camp a disagreeable place."

Francisco nodded.

"It is not difficult," he replied, "to appreciate his point of view, but somehow I can't help feeling that the master is more disagreeable even than the place itself." He hesitated for a moment. "And something tells me," he continued, "that he did not take well our refusal to remain at the camp. Methinks that we shall hear more from him."

"Perhaps," returned Carlos.

CHAPTER IV

THE afternoon was drawing to a close, and the shadows were stretched out across the paths in the garden. The sunlight glistened on palms and flowers, and breaking through the leaves flecked the grassy spots with patches of brightness. A light breeze played with the spray from a fountain, spreading it out fan shaped to catch the glowing colors of a miniature rainbow, and the bright plumage of birds appeared here and there through the foliage.

Francisco walked eagerly along the winding path, his feet crunching softly in the gravel. He brushed aside a swaying branch, and rounded the turn that brought him to the old stone seat beneath the giant rose bush. But it was empty. A few fallen rose leaves lay upon the gray slab, and in front of it a weeping willow trailed the tips of its slender branches in the glassy water of the lily pond. A waterfowl, startled by his sudden appearance tipped oddly up on end, wiggled its tail in the air, and disappeared beneath the surface, leaving a slowly moving wrinkle on the face of the pool. A mockingbird sang for a moment in the willow tree and then, with a flutter of wings darted away leaving

Francisco to listen to the faint sound of the breeze as it gently swayed the leaves above his head.

He stood for a moment, staring absentmindedly at the water, then roused himself and threw off his cape, spreading it over the stone seat. He smoothed it out and sat down, leaning forward with his forearms on his knees, his hands clasped. The waterfowl reappeared, and with head erect looked suspiciously with glassy eye in the direction of the bench. Finally assured that there was no danger it sailed silently off, alternately ducking its head beneath the surface, and raising it high to shake it energetically, in an attempt to swallow some delectable morsel.

For five or ten minutes Francisco sat meditating, gazing with unseeing eyes out upon the surface of the water where the sunlight and the shadows lay intermingled in slowly changing shapes. So deep was he in his own thoughts that he failed to hear the rustle of a gown behind the rose bush, or see Dolores as she appeared. Seeing him, she stopped, one hand slightly lifting the hem of her skirt above the grass, the other pushing aside a branch of the rose bush. For half a minute she stood still, her black eyes bright, her cheeks flushed, her attitude one of thrilled expectancy. Then dropping her hands she clasped them in front of her, and assuming a more demure expression, spoke.

"It would seem," she said in a soft voice, and Francisco leaped to his feet at sound of it, "that I

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am not to be very graciously received by Your Excellency."

Francisco bowed low.

"On the contrary," he replied, sweeping off his hat, "I apologize most humbly for not hearing you approach. If you will honour me by sitting beside me on this bench perhaps I can explain."

She laughed gaily.

"Your reception is better than I dared at first to hope," she replied, "but why were you so deep in your own thoughts?"

"It is that that I would tell you," he replied.

They sat down together on the bench, and for a moment neither said a word, Francisco gazing at a pond lily that grew amid its green-black lily pads near the edge of the pool. A stray sunbeam had touched upon it, lighting up its waxen petals which stood out in sharp contrast to the dark green leaves and the black water.

"How beautiful this garden is," said Francisco at last, "and how very different from a place I visited this morning."

"What place?" she asked.

He did not reply at once, but frowned instead.

"The prison camp," he said at last. "Carlos and I were taken out there by Señor Gorgoza."

"I have never been there," she returned, "but I have heard that it is not a kind place to the prisoners."

"No," replied Francisco, "it isn't. And it was

of something that I saw there this morning that I was thinking when I failed to hear you approach."

"Tell me of it," she requested.

Francisco glanced up, and hesitated for a moment.

"It is not an agreeable story," he returned. "It is never a pleasant thing to see a person do a thing he should not do." He paused, and then continued. "This morning I saw a gentleman perform the work of an executioner."

"Señor Gorgoza?" she questioned, looking up at him.

He glanced at her in surprise.

"Why do you suggest him?" he asked.

"There may be other men of position in Mexico who would be capable of such a thing," she replied, "but they are not numerous. It was merely a guess on my part, but now I see that I was right."

They both sat staring at the water. Finally Francisco spoke.

"Is it necessary," he asked, "to be cruel and unjust with the natives of this land, in order to rule them?"

"Fray Juan says that being cruel and unjust accomplishes less than being generous and just," she replied.

"And do you believe that?" asked Francisco.

"Yes," she answered.

"And I, too, believe it," he said, positively.

They sat silent, while the breeze whispered in the branches of the willow, and swayed the rose

bush above them. A little cluster of rose leaves fluttered down and touched Dolores' hair with red, and fell into her lap. Francisco looked at her, and his heart beat loudly, thumping until it seemed to him that she must hear it. He covered her hand with his as it lay on the stone beside him. She flushed and looked at the rose leaves in her lap, and with her free hand rolled one between her fingers.

"Dolores," he said at last.

She did not look up, but instead lowered her head still more, and crushed the rose leaf. He leaned closer, with his lips almost at her cheek.

"Dolores," he repeated, in a whisper, "I love you."

He put his arm about her and drew her to him. Her drooped head lay on his shoulder, and for a moment they sat thus. Then he gently raised her face, and kissed her on the lips.

A footstep sounded in the gravel of the path, and a coldly polite voice spoke.

"I am sorry," it said, "that I have interrupted so touching a picture."

Dolores and Francisco leaped to their feet, and faced Gorgoza, who was standing a few yards down the path. He bowed.

"My intrusion is unfortunate," he continued. "I humbly beg your pardon."

He smiled cynically, and turning, walked down the path, disappearing amid the foliage. Dolores stood gazing after him, her eyes flashing.

"The eavesdropper," she said, in a tense whisper.
"How I hate him."

Francisco put his arm about her.

"Dolores," he said gently.

She looked up at him.

"Tell me that you love me," he whispered.

She reached up and put her arms about his neck.

"You know I do," she replied.

"And you will marry me, if I gain your father's consent?"

"Yes," she whispered.

He gathered her in his arms, and the waterfowl, sailing out from behind a clump of reeds, gazed for a moment in uncertain fear, and tilting oddly up on end again, disappeared beneath the surface, leaving a slowly moving wrinkle on the water, that widened in a fading circle, and disappeared.

CHAPTER V

LATE the next afternoon Francisco emerged from the Governor's study, and walked slowly across the hall and out into the bright sunlight of the court. His head was bent, his hands were clasped behind his back, and a deep furrow lined his brow. He stopped as he entered the court, his shadow black against the stone of the pavement. He stood for a moment, biting his lip, and turning on his heel he reentered the door, strode rapidly along the hall, mounted the stairs, and following a narrow corridor approached a heavy, iron-bound door. He stopped and knocked on the massive oak.

From beyond the door came the shuffle and slap of sandals along the floor, and the door opened ponderously, to reveal Fray Juan, standing with a quill in his hand, just as he had arisen from his writing table.

"I trust that I do not disturb you, Padre," said Coronado.

"Ah, it is Your Excellency," replied the priest. "Indeed you do not disturb me. I am most happy that you have come to visit me in my cell. Enter, and peace be with you."

Francisco stepped inside, and found himself in a

long narrow room with high ceiling, gray walls, and a gray stone floor. The thick wall at the opposite end was pierced by a single window, in which was set no glass and which was guarded by heavy iron rods. The sun shone through it and fell on a rough table, built simply of heavy boards, on which lay the writing implements and the manuscript with which the priest had evidently been employed. A rude stool stood beside the table, and another sat in a corner, while a cot, covered with a heavy blanket, occupied one side of the room. The walls were devoid of ornament, save only for an ivory crucifix, hung in its gold mounted case.

"I am sorry," said the priest as he closed the door, "that I am no more able than I am to make you comfortable. I can offer you only a three-legged stool and a jug of wine. But pray do not judge the sincerity of my welcome by the lack of comfortable surroundings."

"I am in so uncomfortable a state of mind," replied Francisco, "that I am in no mood to think of physical comforts, and I hope that in coming to you for advice on a subject close to my heart I am not intruding."

"If I can be of any service, it will make me happy," replied the priest. "Pray tell me what it is you wish."

"That I cannot do," replied Francisco, "for I do not know myself. It is for you to say, when

you have heard my story, whether or not you can and are willing to help me."

The priest had brought up the extra stool as Francisco was speaking, and motioned him to be seated.

"I shall do my best," replied the priest as they seated themselves beside the heavy table.

"Then I shall tell you the story," began Francisco, leaning forward with his elbows on the table and gazing across it at the serious and furrowed face of the priest.

"I suppose it is hardly necessary to tell you," he continued, "that I have been very much interested in Señorita Dolores."

He stopped for a moment, and the priest nodded his head slowly, and resumed his attentive attitude.

"It is not the whole truth," resumed Francisco, "to say merely that I have been interested in her. As you have probably been able to see I have fallen desperately in love with her. This I told her but yesterday, and she encouraged me to the extent of saying that she did not object to my speaking to the Viceroy."

He stopped for a moment, and dropped his eyes to the floor, bit his lip, and glanced up again.

"I have but just come from him," he continued, slowly, and stopped once more.

For a minute or more both men sat silent. Francisco stared unseeingly at the great seal ring he

wore. The priest leaned forward, his elbows on his knees, his hands clasped. A bird dropped suddenly upon the window ledge, rippled a little song and flitted away. Finally the priest glanced up.

"And he refused?" he asked quietly.

Francisco nodded.

"Yes," he replied.

Silence fell again upon the two, and the sunbeam, that had been creeping slowly along the table, reached the end, and shot a tiny shaft of light down on to the gray stone of the floor.

"What reasons did he give?" asked the priest.

"It is that that I must tell you," answered Francisco, glancing up. "He knew of my family and connections in Spain, of course, and those he naturally held were in my favour. But upon being questioned as to why I had come to the New World I had to admit that I had lost everything at the gaming table before leaving Spain, and that I am now entirely dependent on the income I derive from being appointed by His Majesty as Governor of New Galicia."

He stopped and stared at the patch of sunlight on the floor before continuing.

"And that, as you may guess, is not enough to make me wealthy."

The priest bit his lip and frowned.

"And that was enough to cause the Viceroy to refuse his consent?" he asked.

Francisco nodded.

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"That is not the entire reason," continued the priest, slowly.

Francisco looked up quickly, the question he would have asked apparent from the expression on his face, and the priest went on.

"I fear that Don Antonio overestimates the power and value of wealth, and he is very much under the influence of Señor Gorgoza, who, aside from being the Viceroy's military advisor and chief of His Excellency's military establishment, has amassed a fortune that is truly huge, even by comparison with other fortunes accumulated in the New World. This fortune, it is not unfair to say, has been secured at the expense of those with whom the military have found it necessary or expedient to deal, and, I fear, sometimes even at the expense of His Majesty the King. But as I say, the Viceroy is to a large degree influenced by this man, and does not see—cannot see—many things that are apparent to those of us who are not so close to his movements."

The priest stopped, and Francisco looked at him questioningly.

"But why," he asked, "do you tell me of Señor Gorgoza and his ill-gained wealth?"

"Because, my son," replied the priest, "I have reason to believe that Gorgoza himself is desirous of gaining the Governor's consent to wed Dolores, and that he has already—although perhaps not in so many words—signified his desires in that direction."

"But this is monstrous," cried Francisco, leaping to his feet. "It must not be permitted."

"So I believe," replied the priest, quietly, "and so too Dolores. But the matter is in the hands of the Viceroy and he, unfortunately, is more influenced by Gorgoza than by Dolores, or you, or myself."

Francisco did not reply, but instead paced up and down the room, his hands clasped behind him, his head bowed. Finally he stopped before the priest.

"But what is to be done?" he demanded, suddenly.

"I have been wondering," replied the priest, "and I can think of but one thing."

"Tell me," demanded Francisco.

The priest hesitated a moment, drew his stool closer to the table, and motioned Francisco to be seated.

"The Viceroy," he began, "is, as I said, unduly impressed by the value of wealth. Hence his apparent preference for Gorgoza. But, if your fortune even remotely compared with that of Gorgoza, there is no doubt in my mind that you would be preferred. Your family, and particularly the fact that you are a favourite of His Majesty, would more than make up any difference between your fortune and that of Gorgoza."

"Yes," remarked Francisco bitterly, "but I have told you that I have nothing."

"Just one moment," continued the priest, raising his hand. "You are the Governor of New Galicia,

a land but little known, and beyond which are other lands we know not of. Mexico has made many fortunes since the days of the Conqueror. It is hardly to be supposed that there are not more to be made. And from vague rumors, I have heard that gold is abundant beyond the mountains to the north, from whence no one of many who have gone has yet returned. Go, my son, to your province. Search diligently and learn what can be learned of this land to the north. When you have found it you may find a fortune with which to come back to Mexico City! And should you bring wealth I am certain that the Viceroy will not withhold his consent."

Francisco's eyes shone as the priest finished, and again he leaped to his feet, and leaned across the table.

"I'll do it," he cried. "And I'll return with the wealth of another Montezuma."

But even as he spoke another thought struck him and his gay mood changed as suddenly as it had come upon him. For a moment he hesitated.

"But what of Dolores," he demanded, finally. "She might be forced into the arms of Gorgoza before my return."

"Be not afraid," replied the priest. "Dolores has a mind of her own, and I am not entirely without influence with the Viceroy. I think I may speak for Dolores when I say that we shall see to your interests in Mexico City."

CHAPTER VI

I HAVE sent a note to Dolores," said Francisco to Carlos, as the latter entered his friend's room the next afternoon, "telling her of our decision to leave for New Galicia, and asking her to come with Señorita Isabella to the garden."

Carlos nodded.

"It is as well that we leave Mexico City," he replied. "We must go sometime, and a longer stay will make it no easier."

The two stood looking out of the window that opened on the square. It was all but deserted, and the sun shone brightly on yellow and white walls, on dark green leaves and grass, on the few Indians and Spaniards who were to be seen.

"Only a few years ago," said Francisco, "this square had never seen a white man. Huge temples to bloody gods and great palaces of mighty chieftains surrounded it. Gold was here in abundance, and this was the capital of the mightiest people of Mexico. And then came Cortes, with a handful of followers, who entered the city, and was driven from it, and who entered it again, only to destroy it—to raze its temples and its palaces, to destroy its gods and its dynasty, and to gain for His Majesty

a colony greater and more wealthy than Spain herself.

"And to the north I am told there are rumors of another country as powerful as this was, and as wonderfully rich, with many armed men, with great cities, with much gold and great stores of precious stones. It is to that land that I mean sometime to go. It is there I mean to find another Mexico and it is there that I hope to become another Cortes."

He turned to Carlos, who stood beside him, gazing out on the deserted square.

"And you, my friend," he continued, "must go with me."

"I imagine," replied Carlos with a twinkle in his eye, "that being Cortes the Second enters less into your calculations than being Husband the First of Señorita Dolores."

Francisco smiled.

"True," he returned. "But from what Fray Juan has told me it seems to be necessary firstly for me to become Cortes the Second, in order that secondly I may become Husband the First. But let us go to the garden."

The two friends parted as they entered the garden, Carlos turning toward the arbor which stood near the entrance, while Francisco walked rapidly along the curving gravel paths toward the far corner where the giant rose bush sheltered the stone bench beside the pool. As he approached the pool he left the path and strode across the lawn,

his footsteps falling softly on the grass. The bench was cut off from view by the rose bush that stood behind it, and it was not until Francisco was within a few yards that he heard voices. Surprised that others should be in this sheltered corner he stopped and was about to retrace his steps when the voices grew louder, and he caught a note that riveted him to the spot. Again the voice he recognized spoke, and a deeper voice replied. Then came a movement, a shuffle of feet in the gravel, and a scream.

Instantly his indecision vanished, and he dashed across the intervening distance to the rose bush. He thrust aside a thorny branch, and beheld Dolores struggling in the arms of Gorgoza.

With a cry of rage, Francisco grasped the officer by the shoulder, whirled him about, and threw him back against the bench. Gorgoza, surprised by the onslaught, braced himself and tried to draw his sword, but his opponent rushed toward him, seized him bodily, and with a mighty effort lifted him from the ground and hurled him into the rose bush.

Dolores, who had stood by fearful for Francisco, recovered her composure quickly, and approached him.

"I wish to thank Your Excellency," she said, "for coming to my rescue at so opportune a moment. I am not at all sure," and she glanced at Gorgoza as he picked his painful way from the rose bush, "what I might have received from the hands of this chivalrous soldier."

Francisco bowed.

"I am happy to have been able to be of service," he replied. "It is seldom that I have so great a pleasure as to throw a scoundrel into the briars, and I am doubly fortunate in having been able to please so gracious a maiden while so thoroughly enjoying myself."

Gorgoza had torn his way out of the rose bush, and stood glaring at the pair. His cape was still hanging to the thorns, the rest of his costume was rent and streaked with dirt. His hands were bruised, and across his cheek stretched a mark cut by some particularly heavy thorn, while his face blazed so scarlet with rage that the tiny drops of blood that stood out along the scratch scarce drew attention unto themselves. He snarled in his fury, unable for a moment to find the words that would express himself, and was infuriated the more by the laughing air of Dolores and the polished serenity of Francisco.

"Son of a dog!" he cried at last, facing Coronado, and growing purple with anger. "I'll have your blood for this!"

Instantly the debonaire pose slipped from Francisco. His brow darkened, his hands clenched, the muscles of his jaw quivered for a moment as he set his teeth. Then slowly, deliberately, he drew his heavy gloves from his belt where he had thrust them, and watching his opponent keenly, he stepped closer to him.

"I shall be happy," he remarked clearly, "to meet you at any time you wish, but for fear that you have not enough cause to feel truly injured I shall give you more."

He drew himself together, gripped the gauntlets of his gloves tightly, and struck Gorgoza across the face with the seamed fingers. The stiff leather left a redder mark on the inflamed cheek. For a moment Gorgoza shrank back, tears of pain in his eyes. Then with an oath he whipped out his rapier, and before Francisco had realized his purpose he darted the flashing blade straight at his opponent's heart. Dolores had stood cowering by, her forced gayness of a moment before gone, her heart pounding furiously as she gazed upon the angry men before her. She stood nearer Gorgoza than Francisco when the former drew his weapon, and she realized the danger that lay in that slender blade of polished steel. Even as Gorgoza lunged she darted forward, and thrusting out her hand she struck the hilt of the officer's rapier. So lightly did she touch it that he scarce realized the pressure, but the point, deflected by the blow, pierced only the silk of Coronado's doublet, and by the time Gorgoza had withdrawn his blade to guard another glittering point stood opposite his own.

For a minute or more the blades danced back and forth, carefully on guard, each swordsman measuring the worth of the other. Dolores shrank back, and stood beside the stone seat, her hand at

her throat, her lips parted. She watched intently, with narrowed eyes. Finally Gorgoza, angry and impatient, thrust wickedly, and Francisco parried. Dolores caught her breath, put her clenched hand to her lips for a moment, and in a slow, subdued voice spoke to her lover.

"Take care, Francisco," she said. "His is the wickedest blade in all Mexico."

Francisco parried another thrust and laughed, parried and thrust and stood on guard.

"His Majesty the King," he replied gently, "has been kind enough to call mine the best in Spain."

The blades darted back and forth, the swordsmen trampled the grass in a wide circle, and the only sounds were the slight rasp as the blades touched, the softened footsteps on the grass, and the deep breathing of the opponents. Round and round they fought, thrusting, parrying, feinting, and as Gorgoza became more wary Francisco grew more brilliant. His blade flashed forward and back, weaving the reflected sunlight into a strange pattern that fascinated Dolores as she watched. Faster and faster flashed his thin blade, and less and less had Gorgoza time for anything save defense. He was forced back, ever closer to the edge of the pond, and finally he found to his dismay that his foot was at its very edge, and the ever darting rapier that faced him prevented any movement of his save toward the water. Dismayed at the prospect, he sought to save himself by gaining

the upper hand. His defense became less careful, his thrusts more reckless, and finally as he lunged he felt a stinging shock in his wrist, his forearm seemed paralyzed, he felt his fingers relax their grip on the hilt, and heard his rapier as it whistled through the air and ended its flight by burying itself up to the hilt in the shallow water and mud at the edge of the pond, where the hilt quivered for a moment amid the lilies and then stood as still as the white petals of the flower beside which it came to rest.

Unarmed and defenseless, Gorgoza faced his opponent. Francisco lowered his blade, and stood meditating.

"Run me through!" cried Gorgoza. "Run me through and have done!"

"I shall not run you through," replied Francisco. "But should you ever draw again with me as your opponent, I take my oath that I will kill you. And now leave the garden. Señorita Dolores and I have had more than enough of the pleasure of your company."

Gorgoza glared, but the keen point of Francisco's rapier moved threateningly, and although he clenched his hands and ground his teeth together he moved slowly off along the path, his head sunk, his soul bitter within him. Glancing back as he turned the corner his hatred burned more furiously, for he beheld Francisco as he approached Dolores and gathered her into his arms.

CHAPTER VII

A NIGHTINGALE was singing in the moonlight beside Coronado's headquarters at Compostela in New Galicia. In the stillness of the September night the song floated clearly through the quiet air, seemingly as liquid as the great dew drops that clung to the grass stems beside the door. A screech owl, far down the valley quavered its mournful note, and from the moonlit silver of the river at the foot of the hill came the croak of the frogs, and the palpitating rasp of a myriad of crickets. The walls of the building stood white amid the blackness of the pines, and from the patio within came the subdued voices of men-at-arms off duty, polishing their weapons, or gambling on the pavement of the court. A candle threw a fitful yellow light through a narrow slit that served the priest of the garrison as a window to his cell, and the drone of his voice as he told his beads mingled with the faint sounds of the night. An Indian, wrapped in a blanket, sat cross-legged on the ground in the shadow of a gnarled tree, and in halting Spanish spoke slowly to Francisco and Carlos, who occupied a bench across which the moonlight and the twisted shadows of the ancient

tree fell in a complicated pattern of white and black.

"To the west," said the Indian, carefully choosing his words, "lies the Great Water, as you know, my lords. Beyond the Great Water I do not know what lies. But toward the star that does not move no one knows. There are many tales told of a land of powerful peoples, who live on mountains; whose cities are more wonderful than any in Mexico; whose armies are more powerful even than those were that Montezuma led; whose temples are magnificent; whose gods are powerful and demand many sacrifices of prisoners taken in war; whose houses are built of stone and are decorated with precious stones; and whose commonest household utensils are of that yellow metal of which the white lords are so fond.

"But, my lords, of these tales I know only through the tongues of the old men and women who tell them to the children in the evenings by the fire."

He lapsed into silence, and only the distant rasp of the crickets and the croak of the frogs broke the stillness that lay as lay the moonlight about the scattered huts and buildings of the town.

"And is there no one in Compostela who knows more of these strange people to the north?" asked Francisco finally. "Are all these stories merely old men's tales and old women's fancies?"

For a moment the Indian did not answer, and sat with shoulders stooped and blanket tightly drawn.

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"There is one old man," he replied at last. "He may but tell the things he dreams. I do not know, for he is old—very, very old. Even as a boy I remember him as wrinkled and bent, with whitened hair and toothless jaws; with crooked hands and shaking knees. I have often sat beside his fire with other children and listened to his tales. It may be they are true. I do not know."

"Does he dwell in Compostela?" asked Carlos.

"Yes, my lord," replied the Indian, "and but a little way from here."

"Bring him to us," ordered Francisco.

The Indian rose, stood for a moment with his blanket hanging from his shoulders, then threw one loose end about himself, and trotted away through the moonlight and the shadows.

"I did not know that a month could pass so slowly," said Francisco, as the Indian disappeared into the blackness of a group of trees.

"Nor I," returned Carlos. "Mexico City seems much farther away than thirty days. It seems years—aye, and Spain seems ages."

The nightingale trilled a hurried song, flew silently across the moon, and disappeared. A moonbeam found its way through the branches overhead, and sparkled brightly on the jeweled hilt of a dagger than hung at Carlos' belt. A field mouse scurried along the path and squeaked in terror as a silent winged owl dropped from the darkness

of a tree to bear him off in silence in the darkness overhead.

"Thirty days," repeated Francisco. "Thirty days. And but one note from Dolores in that time, and that a week ago. But in it she repeated that she loved me and would wait—would wait until I come to claim her. But in all these thirty days we have heard only old men's stories of a land they've never seen, and foolish women's tales of lands where the people hold strange things they call by some unnatural name, between their teeth, and breathe out clouds of smoke from nose and mouth.

"And I suppose that this old and toothless native will but chatter more of just such foolish things as men who breathe smoke, or whose eyes shoot fire, or who fly to nests in the tree tops. But if we would learn of what there is in this land in which we are to secure our fortunes I suppose that we must take much such chaff to get the grain."

As he was speaking, the Indian who had left them reappeared in the moonlight leading a strangely misshapen figure—a figure shorter by half than he, and stooped—stooped pitifully until the gnarled stick held as a cane in a hand more gnarled needed only its scant twelve inches to support the shaking arm that exposed half its dried and skinny length below the faded folds of a threadbare blanket. Slowly the two made their way across the patch of moonlight—the one a vigorous embodiment of youthful vigor, the other a frail and shrivelled

memory of a long departed past; the one symbolical of the vibrant summer that spread its teeming life about the moonlit town, the other a human counterpart of the ancient and hoary mountains that reared their snowy summits to the moonlight in the distance.

They approached the two seated on the bench, and stopped. Francisco and Carlos rose to their feet, and stood for a moment gazing at the grotesque figure before them.

"Such venerable age," said Carlos slowly, "demands respect. Let us seat him on the bench."

"Nay, my lord," replied the old man's guide. "He would not understand its use. For more than six score years he has used his haunches, and now he is too old to learn."

"So let it be," returned Francisco. "But had we known of his great age we would have gone to him, not ordered him to us. But he is here. Pray have him tell his story, and let him know that we shall pay him well."

"His story is yours for the asking, my lords," answered the Indian. "And as for pay he wants only to be allowed to sit in the sun with a handful of marrow bones to suck."

The old man dropped to the ground, his blanket covering him completely, and with the shadows of the branches overhead lying across his back, he looked more like a huge ungainly toad than like a man. Only his head was different, and his black

eyes, that glistened in the moonlight. Carlos and Francisco reseated themselves on the bench, and the Spanish-speaking Indian, wrapping his blanket more closely about him, carefully chose a place on the grass, and sat down cross-legged beside the ancient tribesman. None of the party heard a footstep in the shadow by the building, or saw a Spanish man-at-arms as he silently stooped and sat down upon the grass behind a bush but an arm's length from the bench.

"He does not speak your language, my lords," said the younger Indian. "If you wish, I shall be glad to tell you what he tells me."

"So be it," returned Francisco.

The story began slowly, haltingly, but as the old man warmed to the narrative he became more fluent, and more gripping. With a minimum of effort the younger Indian acted as interpreter, and without a question from either of the young noblemen, the tale was spun.

Without interruption, save by the careful translation by the younger Indian, the old man told his story:

"Many, many winters have passed since I was a young man—I do not know how many—but many. Children have been born, have grown to manhood, and have died since then. Trees, large trees, have sprouted from the earth, have grown to sapling strength, have grown more great, have sheltered nesting birds among their branches, have sheltered

generations of my tribe in their cool shade, and have been uprooted in the mighty storms that sometimes sweep this valley—all since then. And I live on.

“And when I was reaching manhood—before I had taken a woman of the tribe to be my wife—a famine came upon us. Our crops were planted but they failed to sprout, or sprouting, withered and died, or growing did not mature, or maturing did not yield to us a harvest. The roots that we sometimes eat were withered as with a sickness, the nuts that grow on many trees fell from their branches ere they were grown. The birds departed, the animals disappeared, and not enough was left in the valley for us to eat, and many died from hunger.

“In the midst of that summer, when the wild life lived no more about us where our arrows could bring them down, when the corn was withered in the fields, and when the snares that we set remained always empty, the chief of the tribe called together all the men who were strong. He told us that he had seen the like before, and that the birds and animals that had left our valley had gone to others, where food was to be found—where the corn was not withered, and where fruit hung on the trees.

“And he talked with us, and said that we could follow and bring back food for those who could not travel. And so we went.

“Ten score of us set out, and marched in the direction marked by the star that never sets. We

passed valley after valley, finding a little game in one, a little fruit in another, but never much. Always only enough to drive us on.

"And finally we came to the edge of a great plain, beyond those mountains that the moon now shines upon. Never had a member of our tribe been so far in that direction before—or since. And at the edge of this plain there were many who would have turned about. But we came to a little village in which lived a score of people, who also were without much food, and had only corn that they told us by signs, for they spoke not our tongue, came from a rich land that lay across the plain. Seven days' journey, they told us, would take us there, and once there the land was one of plenty. And so we went.

"For many more than seven days we traveled, for there were many of us, and we were weak from hunger, and traveled slowly. But at last, when some had dropped from hunger or from thirst, we reached a valley, and in the valley there was food. And in the valley also there were people, who fled at our approach, thinking us enemies. And we stopped and rested, and traveled on. And we reached yet another valley in which there was a mountain, the sides of which stood straight and high, until an arrow from our strongest bow could reach the top only if it could have flown upward again from where it struck, and striking could have flown again, five times or more.

"And on the flat top of the mountain stood a

city, to which the people we had seen in the other valley had fled. And many of the people of the city stood at the edge of the mountain, looking very small against the sky. And leading to the top there was but one small path, on which at many places two men could barely pass. And at these places were great heaps of stones that could be built to form a wall, or could be dropped upon the path where it wound across the rock below.

"And seeing from the city that there were but few of us compared with them, their army rushed down upon us, and ere we could tell them of our wants, or entreat with them as friends, they fell upon us, and with arrows they killed many, and with spears they killed the wounded, and at last those of us who remained were surrounded by many, many score of warriors, who forced themselves upon us, and overcoming us took from us our bows and arrows, and binding us with cords led us up the path into the city.

"And we were placed in a small house apart from the others in the city—all of us in one small room, for there remained but half a score. And for two days or three, I do not now remember which, they kept us there, and fed us through the window. And then they came and took us out, and led us through the city. And such a city I never before saw, and never shall see again. The buildings were built of stone, and seemed to stand one on another, until five or six were sometimes built like great steps.

And to enter the houses they climbed to the tops, and passed through doors that were cut in the roofs, and then climbed down to the rooms inside.

"And we were taken to a great room, as large as is the court of this building in which you live, and there we were led before a great gathering of the chiefs and medicine men of the tribe. And after we were brought in, there was much talking in a language that we could not understand. And we were led out, and to the edge of the mountain. And there the others of my tribe that still remained alive were thrown from the edge. Nine I counted, as they fell, and I watched them as they turned slowly in the air, and so far was the plain below us that I could not hear them as they struck, and the voices of those that cried out faded away ere they reached the bottom.

"And when the others had been killed, and I only remained, they led me away, and placed me again within the room that all of us had had. And night came, and they brought me food, and day came, and still I was held, and night came once more, and with it a bright moon, as bright as this that now throws shadows on our heads. And when I was about to sleep I heard a sound at the window, and an Indian maid spoke to me.

"I did not understand her words, but her voice was soft as the nightingale's. And from her tones and from her signs I learned that she had seen me as I stood and watched my brothers fall from the

mountain. And seeing that I was young, and good to look upon, and did not fear to follow where my brothers led, she loved me. And she had pleaded with her father who was a chief, and had said that it would be well if I should be kept alive, being the youngest and the strongest of the party, and should be sent to warn my people never to come that way again.

"And her father, the chief, had spoken to the head men, as if the thought had been his own, and they had been willing, and so I had been spared. But now they were talking once more of throwing me to the rocks on which my brothers all lay dead, and she had come with water and with food, and was prepared to lead me down the cliff so that I might escape and take her with me.

"All this took much time to tell, for I understood not her tongue, and the moon had almost set when she led me from the room. She carried a skin of water, and a pouch of food, and another pouch in which I heard a sound as of small pebbles, and all of these she gave to me. She led me to the path, and as we reached it we heard a sound as of someone approaching, and suddenly two warriors leaped upon us from a shadow, and I shook them off, but she was taken. And in the struggle I was pushed and fell part way down the path, for it was steep. And, when I had gotten to my feet, more men had come, and I saw that I could not regain the girl, so I fled.

"Many times I nearly fell headlong from the path. Many times I stumbled in the darkness where the moon cast black shadows on the trail. But at last I reached the bottom, as the moon sank behind a distant mountain, leaving the valley black.

"I was followed by many warriors, but in the darkness I was not found, and before morning I had traveled far, and they returned without me.

"I rested when the sun rose, and traveled again, and rested. And at last I reached the edge of the great plain, and feared at first to cross it. But I filled my water skin with water, and my food pouch being partly empty I filled it with roots and berries as I found them. And I threw from me the little pouch of pebbles, which I had not opened. And as I threw them from me the pouch opened, and many stones of wonderful beauty were scattered in the sunlight, where they sparkled like fire and shone with many colours——"

"Sparkled like fire?" shouted Francisco, and the figure behind the bush stirred as he strained his ears to hear. "Sparkled like fire, and you threw them away?"

The old man was startled by the interruption, but presently he continued.

"They sparkled like fire," he repeated, "and shone many colours, so I gathered them together, and brought them with me. It took me eight days——"

"The stones," cried Francisco, "the precious stones! Where are they now?"

Again the old man faltered, but by careful questioning the younger Indian obtained an answer.

"They are buried beneath the floor of his hut, my lords," he said, "and he will show them if you will but follow to their hiding place."

Eagerly the old man was lifted to his feet, and with a young man at each arm he was helped across the patch of moonlight and through the trees to a tiny hut that sat alone in the mottled moonlight. The old man entered, and without a light he scratched in the floor, appearing presently in the low doorway with a small leathern pouch in his hand. Francisco seized it and tore it open. The leather was old and rotten, and fell to pieces in his grasp, and there poured forth a stream of brilliant opals, that blazed in the moonlight, and dropping to the ground, blinked a fiery endorsement of the old man's tale, while from behind a tree in the darkness the crafty eyes of the Spanish man-at-arms opened wide in amazement as Francisco and Carlos stooped and gathered together the sparkling precious stones.

* * * * *

Dawn was turning the east to pink and gray before Francisco and Carlos parted for a few hours' sleep, and seated on the bench they had made their plans.

As soon as their baggage and attendants could be gotten ready for the journey they were to start for

Mexico City, there to lay the story before the Viceroy, and offer in proof of it the stones that now lay in Francisco's wallet.

"With these as proof," said Francisco, as they at last rose from the bench, "the Viceroy can hardly refuse to give us permission to organize an expedition. Perhaps I may be able to claim Dolores sooner than I had expected."

They disappeared through the door. The spying man-at-arms waited for a few minutes in the shadow and then walked to the stable, saddled his horse, led it to the door, and mounted. He stooped and patted his horse's neck.

"A good night's work, caballo," he whispered. "A very good night's work. Gorgoza the Fox will be glad to pay well for this news." And he turned his horse's head toward Mexico City.

CHAPTER VIII

GORGONA leaned back in his chair, put his booted feet on the guard room table, and pressed the point of his drawn rapier against the oaken slab on which his feet rested. His plumed hat was pushed back on his head, his black hair falling from beneath it against the crimson collar of his cape. With one hand he twisted the end of his mustache.

"When did you leave Compostela, Gonzales?" he asked the travel-stained man-at-arms who stood before him.

"Ten days ago, Your Excellency," replied the man. "And the journey has been a hard one. I have spared neither myself nor my mount, for the Governor and Don Carlos seemed much excited, and were determined to start for Mexico City as soon as they could get their company prepared.

"But the roads are bad, and not without dangers to a lone traveler, as Your Excellency knows. I would not have chosen to come as I did save for Your Excellency's instructions when I left with the Governor. But my news is to Your Excellency's advantage, so I risked the danger and am here.

The Governor, with his large party, will not make such speed as I have made, and is likely to be several days longer on the way."

"Yes," muttered Gorgoza, half to himself, "probably." He paused for a moment, and pushed his blade against the wood until it bent slightly. "And you say you saw the precious stones?"

"I saw them plainly, Your Excellency," replied the man. "And not only saw them. I searched in the dark where they had been spilled upon the ground, and found one."

Gorgoza threw his rapier upon the table with a clatter, and sat up with renewed interest as the man fumbled in his wallet.

"You found one?" he shouted.

"Yes, Your Excellency," returned the man-at-arms, as he held out a sparkling opal. "It is but a small one, but it is proof that I am telling you the truth."

Gorgoza seized it, and held it to the light of the window, where the fire in the stone blazed green and red and green again. He examined it carefully, and glanced up at his companion.

"You have done well, Gonzales," he said, "and you shall be paid well. Now go and feed your horse, and yourself, and then go out to the prison camp. And speak not to anyone about the jewels, and particularly answer no questions of anyone here. Say not even that you have come from Compostela, else I shall give you naught but the

sharp end of a whip. Now get you gone, and remember—Hold your tongue!"

Bowing, the man backed through the door, and the clatter of the horse's hoofs as it was led across the pavement of the court drifted into the guard room where Gorgoza was again examining the fiery opal that lay in his hand.

"Jewels," he said to himself at last. "Jewels. And another land of wealth to be conquered. Well, well, Coronado. A spy in your company was not a bad idea. It has served me well. And we shall see who shall lead the expedition—you or I. Methinks it will be I." He chuckled to himself. "Yes, I. I would be willing to make a wager on it." He paused a moment and narrowed his eyes. "And Dolores—Hm! Well, the Viceroy is no fool. Dolores goes to the man with the greatest stake. And the stake is to be had in this new land that lies across the mountains to the north, where I shall go—and take it."

Gorgoza dropped the opal into his wallet, sat back in his chair again, picked up his rapier, and once more crossed his feet on the table. The early afternoon sun shone through the window, marking a bright patch on the floor. A great green fly buzzed lazily about the room, awkwardly changing its direction with many sudden shifts. From the court came the few sounds that the afternoon gave forth—the stamping of a horse's hoof as it stood in the shade—the whistling of a scullion as he

pottered about his work—the twitter of birds beneath the eaves of the entry, and the flutter of their wings as they flew here and there.

In the mind of Gorgoza his problems had simplified themselves. Before the arrival of Coronado he had had full sway in many things dear to his heart. But the coming of Francisco Vasquez de Coronado had changed his world. What was most serious in Gorgoza's eyes was the fact that here was one who would not bend the knee, who looked to him for nothing, and, worse, still, one who hated him as the overbearing bully that he knew himself to be.

And even this was not all. Gorgoza had long since set his heart upon Dolores—not because he loved her, but because he loved the position he knew that a marriage with her would bring, and saw in her a beautiful, fiery creature the possession of whom would satisfy his passions, and decorate his household. But here again Coronado stood in his way. Within the time that lay between two full moons he had arrived from Spain, unknown to any save as the favorite of the king, and had completely won Dolores, who, never familiar with Gorgoza, had, since Francisco's departure, been disdainful almost to hostility.

But Gonzales' report of the old Indian's story and the sparkling opal he brought as proof, had changed Gorgoza's outlook. Instead of being forced merely to look on while Coronado carried off all these prizes of power, position, and love, he

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began to see some possibility of attaining them for himself.

The sun had sunk appreciably before he had matured a plan in which he had confidence, and even then the confidence he felt was somewhat alloyed with doubt. But, at heart a gambler, he did not hesitate, for his work must be done quickly if he would checkmate Coronado who, even then, was on his way from Compostela, and might any day enter Mexico City.

Once having reached a decision, that decision became action, and he rose quickly, sheathed his rapier, rearranged his hair, set his hat at a carefully chosen angle, and left the guard room. He crossed the court and entered the mansion, walking rapidly through the great corridors and halls, and reaching at last the anteroom of the Viceroy's apartments. He approached the guard on duty at the door leading to the inner chambers.

"Inform His Excellency that I am awaiting his pleasure with news of great importance and interest," he ordered.

The man saluted and disappeared through the door. Almost immediately he returned and saluted again.

"His Excellency has bade me say that he will see you," he said.

Gorgoza stepped quickly through the door, closed it behind him, and found himself facing the Viceroy who was seated at his desk.

"Well?" queried the older man.

"I have some very important news, Your Excellency," began Gorgoza. "I have but just received it from one of my men who has been on a trip to the north and west, where he had it first hand from the man who saw that of which he tells."

"Who saw what?" asked the Viceroy abruptly, "and of what does who tell?"

"Of a land, Your Excellency, more rich than was Mexico or Peru," replied Gorgoza, "where precious stones and gold abound, and where great cities lie."

"Hm!" grunted the Viceroy. "I have heard such tales often in the years I have been Viceroy. In what does this one differ from others you have heard, that you are so wrought up over it?"

"With this story, Your Excellency, has come proof," returned Gorgoza.

"Proof?" questioned the Viceroy sharply. "What proof?"

"It is here, Your Excellency," answered Gorgoza, as he took the opal from his wallet.

He passed it to the Viceroy who examined it carefully, then pursed his lips and raised his brows before replying.

"Oho," he said presently. "And what is the story and where the land? Sit yourself down and tell me."

Gorgoza drew up one of the massive chairs, and sitting beside the Viceroy's desk began his story, his mind keenly awake to the possibilities of imag-

inative decorations to the tale, and aware of the necessity of incorporating with the details as he had received them, enough of his own imaginings to prove to the somewhat gullible Viceroy that his story came from another and more reliable source than came the story that Coronado was even then on the way to Mexico City to repeat.

An hour later he finished. The tale had grown more complicated and more vivid with his narrative. The opal had come from the north in the wallet of a Spaniard many, many years more youthful than the old Indian who told Coronado his story. Narrower and less difficult to cross was the desert, larger and more magnificent the city on the mesa. Gold shared with gems the space in great treasury chests. Temples and palaces reared their glittering towers in innumerable array, and all was to be had for the asking, or at least merely by marching to the north with an armed force under the command of the chief of the Viceroy's military household. And the Viceroy wavered, and was almost convinced.

"And you say a Spaniard has seen this land?" asked the Viceroy.

"Yes, Your Excellency," replied Gorgoza, "a Spaniard, who died of a fever but a day after telling the story to Gonzales."

"And who is Gonzales?"

"A brave and honest man, Your Excellency," answered the officer, "who has been for several years a dependable servant of Your Excellency."

"You believe in him?"

"Absolutely, Your Excellency."

For a moment the Viceroy was silent. Finally he spoke.

"Bring Gonzales to see me to-morrow," he said. "If he tells me a story that sounds as good in mine ears as the one you repeat, methinks I could do worse than send an expedition to a land that promises so much."

CHAPTER IX

THE rain was sweeping in torrents across the city on the third day after Gonzales' arrival, when Pedro rode across the square and entered the court of the palace to announce that his master would arrive later in the afternoon with Don Carlos and twenty men. Dismounting from his dripping horse he led her to the stable, unsaddled and carefully groomed the tired and muddy animal, then hunted up the major-domo. Having delivered his message, which was promptly taken to the Viceroy, he went once more to the stable and saw to the feeding of the mare. Still in his own dripping garments he carefully prepared her stall, examined her hoofs for possible stone bruises, and satisfied that everything was well with the beast he decided to look after his own comfort, pausing for a moment to pat the animal's shoulder as she stood munching in the dim light of the stable. He had just turned to go when a muffled man-at-arms appeared in the doorway and stood for a moment silhouetted in the half light of the streaming courtyard. He peered about for a moment, as if fearing to be recognized, and Pedro, wondering at the attitude of secrecy that the man seemed to suggest, waited quietly in

the darkened stall, unheard and unseen. Satisfied that no one was within, the man entered, walked quickly past the stall in which Pedro stood, hurriedly saddled a black horse that occupied a stall in the farther corner, and led it to the door, where he stopped for a moment to adjust his cape, the dark red of which gave the only touch of colour to the drab surroundings. Pedro had had no opportunity to see his face, but, as he turned to mount, the light fell on it, and Pedro's brows rose with surprise.

"Hm!" he muttered as the man rode through the doorway into the rain. "So the man and the horse that were missing at Compostela have found their way to Mexico City."

He stood for a moment after the man had disappeared and then, with a puzzled look on his tanned face, he walked out of the stable into the rain, still wondering.

Francisco and his party, meanwhile, were riding through the rain ten miles or more from the city. Wrapped in their capes, with dripping hats pulled down over their eyes, with heads turned from the driving gusts and shoulders stooped, they made their slow progress. The roads, never good, were now fetlock deep in water, with slippery boulders and deep pools that forced a snail's pace on the travellers. The horses slipped and slid along the way, jostling their riders, and occasionally stumbling into the gulleys or over the rocks. The single line of horsemen stretched for half a mile or more along

the tortuous way, as the dejected horses plodded the narrow track, choosing their own pace, and all but unguided by their riders. They approached an easy slope, and the road became better, the water trickling along it in a rill, leaving the rocks and holes visible to the eye. The rain slackened, and the spirits of the party mounted. As they climbed the hill the rain became a drizzle, and as they reached the crest the drizzle ceased. Half way down the slope before them lay the prison camp, the quarry partly filled with water and the eaves of the cluster of buildings still dripping. Slowly the mist cleared away, and through a break in the clouds shot a sunbeam, that pierced like a rapier through the light vapours and fell in sparkling radiance on the still agitated surface of the lake in the distance. Francisco and Carlos drew up their horses, and one by one the men-at-arms rode up behind them. They unwound their soaked capes, and shook the water from their dripping hats. A horse shook its head and blew a long sigh of relief. Here and there a man dismounted to tighten a girth or examine a stone bruised hoof. The clouds broke overhead, the clear sky appeared, turquoise blue through the rain washed air, and, as the party tightened their slackened reins to resume their journey, a black horse, bearing the figure of a Spaniard wrapped in a dark red cape, rounded a turn in the road ahead, rode for a hundred yards or more in sight of the advancing party, and disap-

peared among the scattered structures of the prison camp.

* * * *

The word of Francisco's expected arrival with his party was given the Viceroy while Fray Juan was being consulted about a matter of repairs to the chapel of the viceregal mansion, and Juan, upon leaving the Viceroy's apartments, sent word to Dolores and Isabella, asking them to meet him at once in the room to which they came each morning for the brief period they spent at their studies. He had waited but a few minutes when they opened the door, and he greeted them with a smile so broad, and a manner so cheerful, that without his saying a word both girls saw that he had some word for them that was unexpected and pleasing.

"What is it, Padre?" asked Dolores, crossing the room to where he stood by the window.

"I have some news that I think will interest you," he replied. "Something that you have been wishing for, but have never expected."

"Francisco is coming," cried Dolores, seizing the priest by the arm, and gazing up at him, her great black eyes shining, and her red lips parted.

"And Carlos," added Isabella, seizing him by the other arm.

The priest looked down at the two girls and smiled.

"Is it true, Padre?" questioned Isabella. "Tell us, is it true?"

Slowly he nodded his head.

"They are coming," he replied. "And will be here this afternoon."

"This afternoon?" cried both girls in the same breath.

"This afternoon," repeated the priest. "Francisco's man arrived not an hour since with the news."

Dolores looked out the window at the rain soaked garden. The drenched arbour lay but a stone's throw distant, no trysting place to-day. Across the garden she could see the pool beside which sat the old stone bench beneath the rose bush, and she knew that the rain was dripping from the rose bush to the bench, and from the bench to the rain soaked ground. She knew, too, that her father would permit of only the most formal of greetings in the great hall below, and that, probably, not until evening.

"Padre," she said suddenly, looking up at him.

"Yes?" he replied.

"Where can we see them—" she stopped a moment, and added—"alone?"

He did not reply at once, but looked out the window where the rain had but just begun to slacken. For a moment his brow wrinkled.

"They are to be given apartments at the other end of the corridor that runs past this door," he said finally. "I shall go with them to their rooms,

and once getting rid of their servants, tell them to meet you here. Does that meet with your approval?"

Dolores let go his hairy hand, and putting her arms about his neck, raised herself on tiptoe and kissed his cheek. Isabella squeezed his hand, and letting it drop turned away as two great tears rolled slowly down her cheeks.

As Francisco and his party entered the gate to the courtyard Fray Juan greeted them.

"Let me act as the major-domo," he suggested after they had dismounted and turned their horses over to the lackeys. "I should like nothing better than to lead you to your rooms."

"And we should like nothing better," replied Carlos, "than have you lead us."

"Then follow me," returned the priest, as he led the way across the court, into the mansion and up the long flight of stone steps. They followed, each wondering whether or not there was more to the priest's strange manner than appeared on the surface, but not a sign did he give as to his intentions until they had entered the apartments assigned to them. The priest led the way, and closed the door behind them. Then turning he cleared away their doubts almost before he spoke.

"There are two dwellers in this mansion," he said, "who, as you well know, are waiting now to see you. But should the Viceroy learn of your

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meeting them it might go ill with all of you. I shall remain here with mine eyes open. Go, both of you, down this corridor to the last door on the left. You are wanted there. But stay not overlong." He opened the door, and smiled as he watched the two lithe figures walk rapidly down the hall.

It was late in the evening before Francisco was able to tell the story he had come to Mexico City to repeat, but finally, he and Carlos, closeted with the Viceroy, spread the opals on a table beneath the flaring candles and retold the old Indian's story. The Viceroy examined the stones and listened carefully, not interrupting with a single word the flow of the narrative. Finally Francisco finished.

"This new land," he added, "lies on the unexplored borders of New Galicia. According to the warrant given me by His Majesty it might even be said to lie within New Galicia itself, for New Galicia is described according to the papers given me by His Majesty, and to which his seal is affixed, as lying to the north and west of New Spain, its own limits to the north not being fixed.

"Therefore it might be argued that as part of the territory of which I am governor I already have the right, by His Majesty's authority, to explore it and conquer its inhabitants. But the means at my disposal are too limited—I have neither men nor the supplies necessary to organize so great an expedition. Furthermore I am anxious to secure Your Excellency's permission and assistance, relying on

Your Excellency's authority rather than my own right as based on papers made up without definite information of this condition as it now arises.

"I beg Your Excellency to authorize me to organize an expedition, the object of which will be the establishment of the church in this new land, and the addition of the territory to the empire of His Majesty."

For a moment the Viceroy sat silent, laying the opals out before him in a pattern on the table. Finally he pushed them aside, reached into his wallet and brought forth another opal, laying it alone upon the table. He looked at it thoughtfully and then glanced up.

"Had you been the first," he said, "to bring me definite news of this land, there would be no question in my mind as to sending you to conquer it. But another has been here before you. This opal came but a few days since from the north and west, and from the story that came with it I suppose the land to be that of which you but now have told, albeit there are differences in the tales."

He paused and watched the sparkle of the stone in the candle light, as Francisco and Carlos leaned forward, intent on his words.

"And it cannot be gainsaid," he continued, "that something is due the one who first brought the news to me. I must think the matter over, and decide carefully. In the meantime you are my guests. But now, señors, pray leave me that I may give this

matter careful thought. *Buenos noches, señores, buenos noches.*"

Francisco and Carlos arose, looked at each other for a moment in speechless apprehension, and turned toward the door. As they crossed the room Francisco hesitated for a moment as if he would have asked a question, but reconsidering, he followed Carlos to the door, glancing back for a moment as he left. The gray haired Viceroy sat leaning over the dark table in the light of the candles that threw a soft glow across his thoughtful face. The dull silver of the candlesticks shone faintly, and sparkling green and red the opals lay scattered on the oak.

Silent and dejected the two friends walked through the anteroom. They passed the great doorway, and went out into the night, cool and starlit after the rain. The court was quiet and deserted, save for a sentry standing beneath a smoking torch beside the guard room door, and the stillness oppressed them, as if it were the calm before a storm of disappointment. Here and there a light shone through some casement in the great dark building, and in the walls of the men's quarters were three windows, glowing faintly with the light of half a dozen candles that glimmered among the vague shadows of the interior, which, visible as they waved slowly back and forth, reminded the two friends of the gloomy outlook that lay before them. The blue-black sky was dotted with a myriad of

stars that twinkled overhead, but no note of cheerfulness did they convey.

"Who else has brought the news?" asked Francisco, finally.

"I cannot guess," replied Carlos, "but that it is someone of position there can be no doubt, otherwise there would have been no thought of sending him as head of an expedition."

"I had not thought of that," returned Francisco. "But it is true."

The pair had crossed the courtyard, and walked slowly through the gate into the silence of the square outside. The sentry stood stiffly as they passed him, holding his pikestaff rigidly until they had disappeared, and not noticing Pedro as he approached from the dimly lighted quarters of the men.

"Was that His Excellency my master who just passed through the gate?" asked Pedro of the guard, who, startled by the voice, turned with a quick motion as if to defend himself. Seeing that the intruder intended no mischief he lowered his pikestaff and grinned shamefacedly.

"Yes," he replied. "He is with Don Carlos."

"Gracias," returned Pedro, as he followed the pair. Hearing his footsteps as he followed them, they turned about to see who was approaching.

"Oh, it is you, Pedro," said Francisco, as the man approached.

"Yes, Your Excellency," replied the man. "I thought that you might like to know that just after

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I arrived this afternoon I saw the man who disappeared with the horse from Compostela the day before our departure. I saw him but for a moment, but I know that it was he."

"How comes he to be in Mexico City?" asked Francisco.

"I know not, Your Excellency," answered Pedro. "And none of the men-at-arms that I have questioned can tell me. He had not stayed in the city, but has been here several times, having arrived three days ago. Each time he comes he speaks no word to any save only Señor Gorgoza, who took him once to see His Excellency the Viceroy. The men have told me of him, for they do not like his silence or his airs."

"He shall be punished if he comes again," returned Francisco. "I'll not allow a member of my garrison to leave his post without my own especial knowledge and permission. Let me know if you hear of him again."

He turned to walk on in the darkness, but Carlos seized his arm.

"Francisco!" he cried. "Are you mad? Do you not see that there may be more to this than merely a runaway man-at-arms?" He turned to Pedro. "Tell me, Pedro," he continued. "When did this man disappear from Compostela?"

"A day or two before we left, señor."

"Yes, I know," returned Carlos. "But tell me exactly when."

"I do not know exactly, señor," replied Pedro. "We left in the morning. He was first found to be missing early on the morning before."

"Do you hear, Francisco?" cried Carlos. "Do you hear? He left Compostela on the morning after the old Indian told his story."

"Yes," replied Francisco, still unconvinced. "But he had not been told. You and I were alone with the two Indians. He could not have known."

"But we were near the men's quarters," returned Carlos. "He might have overheard the story in the dark. He could easily have overheard. We were out of doors, with darkness all about us, and he might have been concealed quite near us, without our knowledge."

"Yes," conceded Francisco. "But we do not know."

"But if we find the man we can soon learn," Carlos insisted. "Pedro, how was the man dressed?"

"I only know, señor," replied the man, "that he wore a dark red cape. But dark red capes are common. Many of us have them. His hat I do not now remember, and the rest of his clothes I did not even see."

"Which way did he ride?" queried Carlos, keen now for a possible clue.

"I know not, señor," returned Pedro. "I saw him only as he mounted his horse and rode from the stable to the court."

"What colour was his horse?" asked Carlos.

Pedro hesitated.

"I am not sure, señor," he said at last. "I am not sure—but stay! Yes, I remember. The horse was black. Large and black, and much bespattered with mud."

"Large and black, you say?" queried Francisco slowly. "The horse was large and black? and the man wore a red cape?"

"Yes, Your Excellency."

"Carlos," said Francisco, "do you remember seeing such a man on such a mount as we passed by the prison camp this afternoon?"

Carlos looked at his friend for a moment.

"I do remember," he replied. "Did he not disappear among the buildings just before we passed?"

"Such a man was there," said Francisco. "It may be it was he."

"Pedro," said Carlos, "there is work for you to-night. Get you half a dozen trusty men-at-arms from our company. Saddle your mounts and ride post haste out to the prison camp. If there you find the man of whom we speak, bring him here, by force if necessary. Francisco, give him your authority."

"But I have no authority at the prison camp," replied Francisco.

"You have authority over a deserter from your company," insisted Carlos.

"Yes," agreed Francisco. "I suppose I have. Go, Pedro, and bring him here. But let no word

of what you do be told to anyone until you have informed us what has happened. And come to me as soon as you return."

"Yes, Your Excellency," replied the man, and bowing he disappeared in the darkness.

A few minutes later, seven mounted men-at-arms clattered through the gate, and disappeared amid the darkness and the silence of the sleeping city.

CHAPTER X

DAWN was breaking over the city as Pedro and his party of men-at-arms trotted back across the causeway and through the deserted streets. In their midst was Gonzales, sulkily riding his black horse, his sword and dagger taken from him, his chin buried in the folds of his cape. Not a word had he said since he cursed his captors as they awoke him at the prison camp. Except for a momentary gleam in his little black eyes when the overseer at the camp had threatened to send a messenger post haste to Gorgoza he had betrayed no sign of interest in the night's proceedings, other than to smile grimly as he saw the messenger saddle his horse and ride off in the darkness, ahead of the party he himself was forced to accompany.

Pedro had paid not the slightest attention to the threats and curses of either Gonzales or the overseer, and had gone about his work with the utmost dispatch. Hardly a quarter of an hour had elapsed after he had arrived with his party at the camp before they had seized Gonzales, and had forced him to pull on his boots, saddle his horse, and take his place in the centre of a ring of six determined soldiers.

The gray of the eastern sky had turned to primrose, and the primrose to red and gold by the time the party reached the gate of the Viceroy's mansion, and as it was opened for them Pedro led his party through, only to be confronted by Gorgoza and a little group of guards.

"Stop!" cried the officer, as Pedro started past him.

Pedro reined in his mount, motioned his men on, and turned to Gorgoza.

"Is there any way I can serve the *señor*?" he asked.

"What do you mean by invading the prison camp without my authority?" shouted the officer.

"It is perhaps best," replied Pedro, bowing politely, "that I call His Excellency my master to explain. It may be that I am unacquainted with all the reasons."

"Rodrigo, Hernando, Marcos!" shouted Gorgoza, turning to the guards who had been standing beside him with mouths agape at the extraordinary proceeding. "Seize me this insolent dog!"

"Perhaps it would serve your purpose better were you to have them seize me," said a voice from behind.

Gorgoza turned suddenly as he heard it, and fell back a step as he found himself face to face with Francisco, who had but just crossed the court with Carlos, unnoticed by the group at the gate. Francisco stood looking steadily at his enemy, while

Carlos yawned prodigiously, and with eyes half shut stretched his arms as if still half asleep.

"Was it by your orders," shouted Gorgoza, when he had recovered from his surprise, "that these bastard men-at-arms took a man from my prison camp without my authority?"

"It was by my orders," replied Francisco, "that my men captured a deserter from my garrison who was in hiding at the prison camp."

Gorgoza stood for a moment speechless in his rage, his mind a maelstrom of conflicting emotions, in which hate of Francisco, anger because of Gonzales' capture, and the hateful realization of Francisco's advantage were seething. He clenched his fists, and quivered in his fury, conscious only of the fact that he was helpless.

"You shall hear from this," he cried at last, and throwing the loose end of his cape about his neck he strode past the group and entered the door of the guard room, closing it violently behind him.

* * * * *

Francisco and Carlos tried to interview Gonzales after their encounter with Gorgoza, but the man insisted on holding his tongue, and would neither admit nor deny his guilt. He merely refused to speak, and when Pedro suggested to his master that there were ways of making such men talk, the prisoner's little eyes only glinted with hate, and his tongue remained as silent as before. But Fran-

cisco, not being convinced of the necessity of forcing a confession as yet, finally left the man, and with Carlos went to the Viceroy's apartments to ask for an audience.

After a delay of half an hour or more they were admitted to the Viceroy's study, only to find it deserted. An obsequious servant informed them that His Excellency would presently see them, and they sat waiting in silence for what seemed an interminable time, watching a beam of sunlight as it slowly crept down the wall, and listening to the chirping of the birds that nested in the vines outside the window.

The beam of sunlight had reached the floor, and the birds had left the vines for the trees and bushes of the garden before the door opened, and when it finally swung aside it was to admit not the Viceroy, but Fray Juan instead. He bowed solemnly as he entered, and the two rose and bowed in return.

"*Buenas dias, señores,*" said the priest. "*Pax vobiscum.*"

"*Mil gracias, Padre,*" replied the two friends together, and Francisco continued. "We did not realize how early was our visit, Padre, else we would not have troubled His Excellency until later. I fear we have caused him to arise earlier than is his wont."

"Do not fear, Francisco," returned the priest. "Long before you came he was about, and for half an hour past I have been with him, going over some

important papers that he wished to see before he leaves."

"Before he leaves?" queried Carlos. "Whither is he bound?"

"'Tis true, you have not heard," replied the priest. "Last evening, just after you had left him, he called me in and informed me that he would leave for his estate at Tezcoco this morning. He also told me that his daughter and Señorita Isabella would accompany him—Oh! Madre de Dios, they have not yet been informed. I must tell them, else they will detain His Excellency." He started across the room. "I must tell them," he repeated, as he reached the farther door, "and must make myself ready, for I too go." He vanished through the door, and as he hurried across the anteroom they heard him call back to them. "Adios, señores, adios. We shall return on the sixth day from to-day—the sixth day—" and his voice faded away as he passed into the corridor.

Francisco and Carlos looked at each other in blank astonishment, but before they could utter a word the Viceroy entered.

"I am sorry, señors," he said, "to have kept you waiting, but I have been hard at work preparing for a week's absence."

"We have news for Your Excellency—" began Francisco.

"I am sorry," interrupted the older man, "that I have not the time to listen at present. We have

a long ride ahead of us and must soon start. I am leaving on business of the church and of His Majesty, and my daughter and her companion are to accompany me that they may have a few days in the country in order to relieve, somewhat, their monotony here. Pray do not think me inhospitable," he said as he turned toward the door, "but the business is pressing. Adios, señores," and he disappeared through the draperies.

Carlos hurried his friend from the room, and as they reached the corridor beyond the anteroom seized him by the arm.

"Come," he said. "Let us find the Padre. It may be he can tell us the meaning of this hurried journey of His Excellency's."

They mounted the stairs, and approached the priest's cell. The door was ajar, and the priest was busily engaged in gathering together a few effects for the trip. He glanced up as his visitors stopped outside the door.

"Enter, señors," he cried, still continuing his task, "and pray forgive me if I continue to collect my few necessities."

"Do not let us interrupt you," replied Carlos. "We merely wish to learn something of His Excellency's reasons for this hurried departure. Can you not tell us?"

The priest busied himself for a minute or two before replying. Finally he glanced up.

"His Excellency has not taken me into his con-

fidence," he said, "and I am not entirely sure that I know."

"Not entirely sure," repeated Carlos. "You mean that you surmise his reason?"

The priest nodded.

"And can you tell us?" persisted Carlos.

The priest straightened up, looked at them keenly for a moment, and went to the door. He looked out into the hall, and satisfied that no one was near, closed the door and returned to where his visitors were standing beside the table. He bent his head and frowned for a moment and then glanced up.

"I do not know His Excellency's reasons for this journey," he began, "and what I tell you may be far from the truth, but this is what I make of it.

"His Excellency has an estate at Tezcoco, near the monastery there. And at the monastery is kept a chest in which is most of the treasure that is held for the expenses of this country. Here in Mexico City is kept only enough for ordinary expenditures, and I believe that the chest at Tezcoco is to furnish the gold necessary to outfit some expedition."

"An expedition!" cried Carlos.

"Ssh!" warned the priest. "Not so loud. And remember, I told you that what I say is merest surmise, so do not take for solemn truth what I have said.

"But I must go, for His Excellency will soon be ready. And remember, I am not certain of what

I have told you, though he was much interested in the papers that gave the monies that had been spent on soldiers and their food and arms. But what he is to conquer I know not, and there are men enough now in his garrison, for Mexico was never quieter. In truth, as I think the matter over it seems I must be wrong, for where would he lead an army? But last night it seemed almost as if that could be his only thought. So take not my words too seriously, for it may be that I am not right. Adios, señores. Perhaps when we return I shall know more. Adios."

The priest gathered up his belongings and departed, while Francisco and Carlos, pondering what he had told them, followed slowly down the stairs and out into the court. A group of horses was at the gate, and a number of men-at-arms were mounted, and waiting. Gorgoza was standing near the guard room door talking with the Viceroy, and Fray Juan was making his belongings fast to the saddle of a raw-boned horse. As Carlos and Francisco approached him he nodded his head toward the doorway they had just passed through, as if telling them to return. The Viceroy stood with his back toward them, and failed to note their questioning faces as they neared the priest, and did not hear him as he spoke to them.

"Back quickly," he whispered, "to the room in which you met them yesterday, if you would see them alone before we go."

Without a word the two cavaliers recrossed the court, walking as carelessly as if their hearts were not pounding in their throats, and once inside the door they ran rapidly up the stairs.

Ten minutes later the Viceroy turned to Fray Juan.

"Did you not say Dolores and Isabella would be down at once?" he asked. "Go and see if they cannot be hurried."

The priest disappeared, and presently returned, accompanied by the two girls. Simultaneously Carlos and Francisco emerged from a little used door almost hidden beneath the vines, to wish the party a pleasant journey and a speedy return.

* * * * *

Gonzales was confined in a tiny room that opened off the quarters occupied by Francisco's men. Outside the door sat a guard, who occasionally looked in to determine whether or not the prisoner had slipped his foot from the heavy iron ring that was made fast to the wall by a chain, or, less often, to bring in a loaf of bread or a jug of water.

A window opened from the cell on to the court, and through it Gonzales could watch the few activities of those who busied themselves in the enclosure. The day was long and irksome. Flies buzzed round his head, and passed unhindered to and from the sunlight without. A mouse ventured from its hole and scurried back when a move of the

prisoner rattled the chain. The loose end of a vine, searching blindly about for a crevice, swayed slowly across the window in the light breeze, and only the hum of a lazy household broke the silence. During all of the day there was no change save of the shadows in the court as the sun rose slowly to the zenith, and sank, seemingly more slowly, behind the roof that formed Gonzales' narrow horizon. The visits of the guard became fewer, his interest lagging, and after he had brought the bread and water for the prisoner's evening meal he closed the door, shot the heavy bolt, sat himself on the steps that led to the doorway of the larger room outside, and dozed lazily in the gathering twilight.

Gonzales silently watched the darkness settle over the court, watched the dimming outlines of the gate, at which stood a man-at-arms leaning idly on his halberd, watched the outline of the roof against the sky that turned from blue to gray and as the darkness gathered turned from gray to black with only here and there a star that but intensified the dark.

The torches outside the gate were lighted, and shed their unsteady radiance beneath the arch, and finally the great gate was closed on its protesting hinges, the heavy fastenings were dropped noisily into place, and only the pale light of a single candle shining through the window of the guard room was left to relieve the monotony of the night.

Gonzales turned from the window, his heart

bitter within him, his belief in Gorgoza gone, his mind made up to admit his guilt, but in the admission to lay at the door of the man whose hireling he had been the blame that belonged there.

The heavy chain clanked as he crossed the cell, and with a snarl on his lips he threw himself on the straw in the corner, and brooded in his anger until he fell asleep.

Gorgoza had spent the day in the guard room, and was now seated, with his feet on the table, his hat on the floor beside him, his rapier in his hand, and his mind in a turmoil. Gonzales, in his eyes, had been guilty of criminal carelessness in allowing himself to be seen and followed to the prison camp, but now that the man was taken there was nothing to do save to bribe him into holding his tongue—to pay him to take the blame entirely upon himself rather than to admit the whole truth and thereby to encompass the ruin of them both.

He waited until the gate was closed and the court deserted, until the quiet of the household assured him that no one was abroad. At last he rose to his feet, picked up his hat, sheathed his rapier, and started for the door. Opening it he paused for a moment, turned and snuffed out the sputtering candle, and stepped out the door. He stood in the dark looking carefully about, and then walked quietly beside the wall in the direction of Gonzales' cell. He stopped before the door that led to the quarters of Francisco's men, and listened to the

snores that alone broke the stillness. Satisfied that all were asleep he crept silently on, alert lest a sound should set his plan at nought. Beneath Gonzales' window he paused, looked carefully about him, and grasping the window ledge drew himself up until his head and shoulders were inside.

"Gonzales," he whispered.

He could hear the man breathing as he slept in the corner, and he whispered again, "Gonzales."

The prisoner stirred and sat up, looking toward the window, in which he could vaguely see the outline of his visitor. He carefully gathered up his chain, gritting his teeth at each clink of the metal, and cautiously crossed the room, listening for any move from the guards outside his door. Reaching the window he listened again for a moment, and finally looked up at Gorgoza as he leaned through the opening.

"What is it?" he whispered, suddenly.

Gorgoza drew himself a little farther through the window.

"I had thought to get you clear before now," he began, still whispering. "But I could not."

"So it seems," replied Gonzales.

"But there is still a way," continued Gorgoza, not heeding the interruption. "If you will but listen to me we can both get clear, and you shall have your hat heaped up with gold into the bargain."

"Then tell me," said Gonzales drawing closer.

"The Viceroy has gone from the city for a week,"

began Gorgoza, "and until his return I see nothing for you but to remain here. But before he has come back you must admit to Coronado that you, having overheard the Indian's story in Compostela, and having found the jewel where it was dropped beside the old man's door, determined to come to Mexico City, and to sell the news to the highest bidder."

"And having done that Coronado will present me with my hat full of gold, I suppose," muttered Gonzales, his lip curling.

"Silence, fool, till I have finished," replied Gorgoza. "You will then be sent to prison, when the Viceroy returns, and——"

"I have no doubt of it," interrupted Gonzales.

"But I am in charge of all the prisons," continued Gorgoza. "So once sent to one of them you shall be set at liberty, and I shall fill your hat to overflowing with gold, yes and shall fill your pockets too, and if you tell your story well, and leave no doubt in the mind of the Viceroy that you alone are to blame, I shall fill both pouches of your saddle bags with silver in the bargain, and, if you wish, I'll send you back to Spain, your passage paid."

"And what assurance have I that you'll hold to your part of the bargain?" asked Gonzales, half convinced.

"Fool," returned Gorgoza, his voice rising in his desire to be convincing. "If I fail you, you can blame me, can you not?"

A sound came from beyond Gonzales' door, and the great bolt clanged back.

"Will you do it?" whispered Gorgoza eagerly.

"Yes," replied Gonzales. The rusty hinges squeaked, and Gorgoza dropped to the ground disappearing in the darkness as the guard swung back the door. He looked about the cell, satisfied himself that Gonzales was alone and tightly fettered, and closing the door once more dropped the heavy bolt into its place.

CHAPTER XI

INFORMED by Pedro on the following morning that Gonzales had signified his willingness to talk, Francisco and Carlos visited him in his cell. He was standing at the window when they entered, and did not turn until they spoke, his attention being drawn to two horses standing beside the guard room door, saddled and bridled, a man at their heads, waiting. Even when addressed Gonzales did not turn so far from the window as to prevent his watching from the corner of his eye the horses and the waiting man-at-arms.

Gonzales seemed as sullen and uncommunicative upon being questioned as he had been on the previous morning, but little by little he let out the story as he had been told to do by Gorgoza.

"I did not think to come to Mexico City until I found the jewel," he concluded. "But with that to prove my story I thought to sell the news to someone here, and so I came."

"But how," asked Carlos, "did you come to be where you could overhear the Indian's story?"

"I was asleep beneath a bush near the bench on which you sat," lied the man, glibly, "and was awakened when the Indian came. At first I paid

but little attention, but when I heard of the jewels I was interested, and so I followed to the old man's hut, and, after you had gone, searched about where the opals had fallen on the ground. Finding one I bethought myself of the many gentlemen in Mexico City who would pay well for such a story, so I came away."

"How came you to tell Señor Gorgoza?" asked Carlos.

"'Twas merely chance," replied Gonzales. "I had seen him often, before I went with the garrison of His Excellency the Governor to Compostela, and knowing he had wealth I bethought myself of him. He was in the guard room when I rode to the gate of the palace, and being required by the guard to state my business I asked for him."

"And he paid you for the news you brought?" queried Carlos.

Gonzales' eyes had wandered, and he was watching the horses at the gate. Gorgoza had come from the guard room and was mounting one, while the man-at-arms tightened the girth of his own mount, and finally swung into the saddle. Gonzales' eyes narrowed. The plan suggested by Gorgoza had seemed full of promise earlier in the morning, but yonder was the officer preparing to ride out with an attendant, free to go his way, and with no part of the blame resting on his shoulders. And here in the cell, surrounded with suspicion already pointing plainly in his direction, was he, and

by his own story he was attaching to himself all the blame, in order that Gorgoza might be thought blameless. True, Gorgoza had promised him freedom when once he should be sent to prison—had promised freedom, and gold, and silver, and a return to Spain. But there was no assurance that Gorgoza would hold to the bargain. And once the prison clanged its door behind him all his protestations would prove vain. Now he saw how impossible it would be to gain his freedom merely by changing his story, should Gorgoza fail him. All this flashed through his mind in a moment. It could hardly be said to have taken form, but his confidence had changed to suspicion—his certainty of final release and a store of gold and silver changed to a fear of prolonged imprisonment, with only the cold dank stone of a dungeon to look upon, and only stale bread and stinking water for food and drink.

Carlos repeated his question, and Gonzales glanced up, just as Gorgoza rode with his attendant through the gate. For a moment his anger at Gorgoza, and his fear of imprisonment gripped him.

“Yes,” he growled. “He paid me, but not what it was worth. It was he—” He stopped, and another chill of fear broke over him. After all, should he blame Gorgoza it would only end with the two of them being punished, if indeed Gorgoza was punished at all. No. Gorgoza would not be punished. His position was too powerful, and his

influence too great. Only the spy would be punished, and there would be no one to intercede for him; no one who would free him from prison. And with Gorgoza in charge of the prisons he knew what punishment awaited him. No. He could not put the blame on the officer, even if he would, for that would make his own punishment worse, not better, and Gorgoza at least had made a promise that he might keep. Again his mind was filled with vague and unclear thoughts, but he saw through the vagueness the danger that lay in that direction, and knew he dared not face it.

"What were you saying of Gorgoza?" Carlos asked.

"Nothing," the man replied, his voice quivering. "Nothing. He had nothing to do with all this except to listen to what I told him and to pay me for it."

And try as they would the two could get nothing further from the man, so finally they left him, and went into the garden, where they walked the curving gravel paths, and talked of the future, and allowed themselves to grow childishly enthusiastic as they planned the conquest of huge cities of stone, in which were countless treasure chests of gold and jewels, and great stores of plate and silver ingots; where the king ransomed his person and his court for a thousand thousand fortunes, and where each lowly tradesman added to the store.

And their imaginings grew apace. The cities

taken, they allowed themselves to wander in fields much dearer to their hearts than could be ransomed cities, and ere their mood fell from them they had traveled far. And in all their wanderings and all their plans were two bright eyed girls, who even then were riding toward Tezcuco, silent amid the chatter of the cavalcade, thinking thoughts as roseate as those that occupied the minds of Carlos and Francisco, and dreaming dreams as bright.

* * * * *

Five days passed—days that seemed endless to Francisco and Carlos in Mexico City—to Dolores and Isabella at Tezcuco. Mexico City was dull and monotonous. The estate at Tezcuco was equally so. Gorgoza had disappeared from sight—was, apparently, spending his time at the prison camp, for messengers were constantly coming and going along the road that led to it. Gonzales had refused to add to his confession, and sat day after day with twisted lips and narrowed eyes in the close confines of his guarded cell. Francisco and Carlos wandered aimlessly about, sometimes riding into the country, sometimes boating on the lake, sometimes idling in the arbour or the pathways of the garden.

It was late in the afternoon of the sixth day that the Viceroy returned. Gorgoza had reappeared and had taken his place in the guard room shortly after midday, while Francisco and Carlos, their

enthusiasm growing after the enervating days that had passed, waited impatiently for word of the party's arrival. Even Gonzales seemed to be more optimistic than was his wont, for he addressed a civil word or two to the guard as he was brought his noon day meal, and stood at the window, watching for the Viceroy as if his freedom, instead of the order for his incarceration, could be had from that proud person.

Tired from the ride, the Viceroy went to his apartments, and the girls, accompanied by Señora de Estrada, were led off protesting to their own apartments, with only the most formal of greetings for their lovers. Only Fray Juan remained with the two friends, and he had nothing of consequence to say until the attendants and soldiers had gone their various ways, leaving the three alone.

"Why did you not tell me," he asked, when they were alone, "why you returned to Mexico City?"

"It was not because we did not wish to do so, Padre," replied Francisco, "but because we had no time. Aside from the señoritas we told no one save His Excellency. And before we could tell you, you left for Tezcuco. But now it seems that you know."

"Yes," replied Juan. "I know now, but I fear me 'tis too late."

"Too late!" repeated Francisco and Carlos together. "What mean you?"

"That another brought the news before you,"

replied the priest, "and that he is to be sent with the expedition."

"You mean Gorgoza?" asked Francisco.

"None other," returned the priest.

"Then set your mind at ease," said Carlos. "Gorgoza will not go."

"You seem confident, my son," replied Juan, his brows rising. "Have you some news bearing on all this?"

Carlos laughed.

"Some very good news," he replied. "The news Gorgoza bore was only our story, passed on by a deserter named Gonzales from Compostela, who, lying hidden in the dark, overheard the tale as it was told to us."

"But how came the news to Mexico City?" queried the priest.

"By this deserter—this Gonzales," returned Francisco. "Having heard the news he bethought himself of the monies he could gain by bearing it hither. And having thought of that he came. And having come he told his story to Gorgoza, who paid him for it, and repeated it, with some changes that may have been changes made by himself or the deserter, I know not which. But certain it is that the story as first told His Excellency did not tell of our connection with it."

"You mean that Gorgoza's story came from the same source as did yours?" asked Juan.

"None other," replied Francisco.

"But can you prove to His Excellency what you say?"

"Nothing is simpler," laughed Carlos. "We have the deserter under guard yonder, where you see the window overhung with vines, and there he has been since we sent Pedro to take him at the prison camp, where Gorgoza had him quartered."

"My friends," said the priest, laying his hand on Francisco's shoulder. "I am very glad. If you can prove to His Excellency's satisfaction that what you have but just told me is true, then I have no doubt that Gorgoza will stay behind while you are sent to this new land of wealth. But I must follow His Excellency, and see that this news is brought to him, ere he has given to Gorgoza the warrant that is even now within his wallet."

He turned abruptly and strode off through the doorway, where he disappeared from sight.

The Viceroy had gone straight to his study, and hardly waiting to seat himself, had sent a messenger summoning Gorgoza to come at once. The messenger had found the officer in the guard room, and Gorgoza, stepping to the door on his way to the Viceroy, had seen Fray Juan engaged in conversation with Francisco and Carlos in the court. Gorgoza had carefully avoided his enemies during the week of the Viceroy's absence, and, subconsciously at least, he felt that he did not care to risk an encounter now. So, hardly realizing why he did so, he followed a circuitous route that led out the

gate and back through a seldom used and heavily ironed doorway in the garden wall. Crossing the garden he entered the corridor in the mansion, and having passed entirely around the court in which Francisco and Carlos were still chatting with the priest, he found himself at last in the Viceroy's anteroom, and was bidden at once to enter the inner room.

The Viceroy was sitting at his desk, which was piled with papers. In his hand was an official document; to which was affixed a seal, and the text of which he was carefully reading as Gorgoza entered. The officer approached the desk, and stopped, waiting for the Viceroy to speak. The old man finished his perusal of the paper, and glanced up, his piercing eyes studying Gorgoza's face for a moment before he spoke.

"Gorgoza," he said at last. "I have here a warrant, which I have had made out, in which you are made the captain-general of the expedition."

Gorgoza bowed, an expression of satisfaction on his face as the Viceroy started to read the warrant aloud. For a week he had been sure that an expedition, of some description, would be sent to this new land of which Gonzales had brought him word. The capture of Gonzales had seemed for the time being to overthrow any possibility of his being placed in command, but the Viceroy was even now reading the warrant to him, and would presently hand him the document. And once that bit of

parchment was in his possession Coronado might hope for it in vain. This was a victory indeed, a satisfaction worth having, worth having been tortured by doubts and fears for a week. The Viceroy finished reading the warrant, and glanced up.

"It was not easy," he said, "to decide whether you or Don Francisco should be sent as head of this expedition. For while you came first with the news, his story was rather the more complete, and his proof the more convincing. But the story being proved to some degree by both reports, it seemed to me that there could be but one just decision, and that depended on who first brought the story. But even that was not without its difficulties, for even as you told your tale to me Don Francisco was on his way from Compostela in order to tell his. So then I found I needs must go back farther still, to see who learned this story first. And so I did, and it was your man who first secured the news. And so, perforce, I was brought to the decision of making this warrant out in your name."

He paused and looked over the document.

"This," he said, holding up the warrant, "will make you captain general of an expedition to be composed of 350 Spanish gentlemen and soldiers, and a thousand natives, with which you will conquer for the Holy Catholic Church and for His Catholic Majesty, King Charles, the land of wealth of which you brought me news."

He held the document aloft, gazing sternly at

Gorgoza, who all this time had remained silent, his thin lips pressed together, but his heart beating a lively tattoo of pleasure, and his eyes flashing his delight.

The door opened silently, and Fray Juan entered. The dim light from the window threw Gorgoza's shadow across the wall in which the door was set and the priest, unseen by the two at the desk, took in at a glance the whole situation. Another moment and the warrant would be in Gorgoza's hands, and the situation would be doubly difficult.

"I crave Your Excellency's pardon for entering unannounced," said the priest, and Gorgoza whirled about, his brow knit and the muscles of his jaw tense. "But I have news that is of vital moment."

"Enter, Padre," replied the Viceroy, dropping the warrant to the desk, "and tell me your news. Your face," he continued as the priest approached the desk, "betokens its serious import."

"It has to do with the warrant lying before Your Excellency," replied the priest, "and I have no doubt it will throw a new light on the subject that has occupied Your Excellency's mind for the past week."

He stopped, casting a quick glance at Gorgoza, who stood silently beside the desk, as if not comprehending the reason for the priest's sudden entry. The officer's face was without a change that could be definitely noted by the priest's sharp eyes, and yet it now plainly expressed his rage and disappoint-

ment where formerly it had as plainly shown his pleasure and satisfaction.

Noting the priest's sidelong glance, the Viceroy guessed its meaning.

"May I ask, Señor," he said, addressing himself with a slight nod to Gorgoza, "that you wait in the anteroom, until I have heard the Padre? I shall send for you then."

Gorgoza bowed, his rage so fierce within him that he dared not risk an answer, his heart so bitter with disappointment that it seemed almost to stifle him, and turning he left the room.

"And now your news, Padre," said the Viceroy, as the door closed behind the officer.

"The tale," began the priest, "told to Señor Gorgoza and to Your Excellency by the man Gonzales, is false."

He stopped, looking seriously into the wide open eyes of the man before him.

"False!" echoed the Viceroy.

"Yes, Your Excellency, and even now the man is being held in a cell as a deserter from the garrison of His Excellency Don Francisco at Compostela, where he overheard the story of this new land as it was being told to the Governor. Having heard it, he planned to sell the news to someone of wealth and position here, and so took himself to horse, leaving Compostela the day before the Governor's departure."

"But you say his tale is false," replied the Vice-

roy. "And yet you add that he heard it from the same source as did Coronado. Is his tale also false?"

"Nay, Your Excellency," answered Juan. "Recall that Gonzales' tale and Don Francisco's differ in many details. In both tales there is a land of gold and that is likely enough. But Gonzales tells of meeting a Spaniard who had seen it, and who died, yet the man was in Compostela with the Governor until but a few days before Your Excellency heard his tale. Yet, as Your Excellency has repeated it to me, he says that the man died many weeks ago."

"You say the man is imprisoned?" asked the Viceroy.

"Don Francisco has him under guard here in the palace," replied the priest.

"Then bring him to me at once," ordered the old man, "and send word also to Don Francisco that I would see him. And bring any others who may have positive knowledge of this affair."

"Yes, Your Excellency," returned the priest as he left the room.

* * * * *

An hour later the Viceroy rose from his chair, and leaned forward across the desk. For a moment he did not speak, and those in the room all but held their breath in anxiety for the result of Gonzales' confession. Gorgoza stood partly in the

shadow, certain of the outcome, yet hoping against hope that the decision would allow his name to remain on the warrant that still lay on the desk.

Francisco and Carlos, stood near Fray Juan, their faces serious, but their eyes clearly expressing the confidence they felt, and on Pedro's face, as he stood guard over Gonzales, was a smile of delight at thought of the sentence about to be passed on the wretch who had played his master false.

"To you, señor," said the Viceroy at last, turning to Gorgoza, "I give this man for punishment. You yourself I consider to be entirely blameless in this affair, but some fitting punishment must be meted out to a man-at-arms who has been guilty of so base a betrayal.

"Padre," he continued, turning to the priest. "Do you take up your quill, and place the name of Don Francisco Vasquez de Coronado on this warrant, where formerly you wrote that of Señor Gorgoza."

The priest crossed to the desk, sharpened a quill that lay beside an ink horn, and seating himself in the Viceroy's chair he carefully substituted Francisco's name, and covering the wet ink with sand from the silver box that stood open before him, held the parchment for a moment, poured the sand back into the box, shook the clinging dust from the surface of the warrant, and passed it to the Viceroy, who had stood silently looking on.

"Don Francisco," said the old man as he took the

document, "I have hereby made you captain-general of an expedition with which I hope you will add glory to the Church, power to His Majesty, and honour to yourself. On the morrow I shall tell you of my plans. *Buenas dias, señores.*"

He handed the open warrant to Francisco, and turning, he abruptly left the room, while Carlos and Fray Juan, after gravely waiting for him to depart, seized Francisco by both arms, and followed by Pedro and his prisoner, opened the door to the anteroom, and disappeared, the joyful chatter of their voices fading slowly away as they entered the corridor beyond.

Gorgoza stood silent in the shadow, alone, burning with hatred. And as he heard the door at the far end of the corridor close behind his enemies, he bit his lip and with bitter heart and frowning brow he walked slowly from the room.

"He has the expedition," he muttered as he passed through the door, "but he shall not have Dolores."

CHAPTER XII

DURING the month following the Viceroy's decision to send the expedition to the north messengers carried the news of it to every city occupied by the Spanish in all Mexico, to Vera Cruz and Cholula, to Oaxaca and Acapulco, to Compostela, and even to Culiacan, that lay in New Galicia, far on the road to the land of promise.

Compostela, designated by the Viceroy as the rendezvous, became the centre of interest for all the adventurous, the curious, and the avaricious among the Spaniards of the country, and groups of adventurers, foot loose and hoping for the spoils that were accepted as the right of *conquistadores*, gathered together, and wended their way across mountain and plain, through valley and forest, to join the army that was in the making.

Trains of pack horses trampled the narrow trail from Mexico City to Compostela into a well travelled road, and agents of the Viceroy assembled the supplies that were to be taken by the expedition into the land of the unknown. In Mexico City Francisco and Carlos busied themselves with countless details, were harassed by innumerable gentlemen who offered their services in the enterprise, and,

with the aid of the Viceroy, made their plans, and set their date of departure.

It was in November that the Viceroy had given Francisco his warrant as captain-general of the force to be organized, and the army was to be assembled for a start from Compostela in February. The time was all but too short, and only the driving power of youth and ambition could have made the necessary arrangements for the cumbersome expedition. Francisco, weighted with the responsibility for the success of the organization, thrived under it. He busied himself in laying plans, appointing assistants, directing activities, and gaining from his subordinates the loyal support that comes only to the few.

He realized his own inexperience, his own shortcomings, but with impulsive, enthusiastic Carlos to suggest the impossible, and calm, clear visioned Fray Juan to counsel care, he built up his army, captained it with veterans, victualled it, equipped it, and gathered it together at Compostela.

Mexico was filled with roving adventurers, many of them Spanish gentlemen in search of excitement and of gain, many more who had been veterans of other expeditions that had searched out the distant corners of Mexico. Some there were who had served with Cortes in the conquest of the country, and others who had aided Pizarro in Peru—the golden land of the Incas. The expedition to conquer the new land of wealth that lay to the north,

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and it may be that it is not far from the sea. Therefore I plan that Alarcon shall sail from Acapulco, along the coast that you will follow, to carry baggage and supplies, upon which you can depend in case of need. As you pass the mouths of rivers or at other likely spots, you will send out messengers, who can, perhaps, keep you notified as to his position, and thus give you another safeguard against failure."

Francisco sat in silence listening, and when the Viceroy had finished speaking his eyes were on the tiny stream of sand that poured steadily through the narrow neck of the hour glass. He watched with unseeing eyes the upbuilding of the hill of sand below, reviewing in his mind the advantages of the Viceroy's suggestion. He remained silent until a tiny landslide broke down the sandy cone, and startled into action by the movement, he glanced up and spoke.

"Your Excellency's plan appeals to me," he said. "Many difficulties that we cannot now foretell may readily arise, and without some outside aid, it might be that our whole plan might fail. With Señor de Alarcon and his fleet of ships to aid us, many serious dangers might come to be but difficulties."

"I am glad," replied the Viceroy, "that the plan seems good. I shall despatch a messenger at once to Acapulco, with word as to his part in our adventure."



For two months Gorgoza had been away from Mexico City. Disappointed by the Viceroy's decision to appoint Francisco to the command of the expedition, and knowing that Carlos and Francisco had more than an inkling as to the part he had played, he planned to avoid them. An inspection tour of the outposts of the Spanish occupation was his pretext for leaving, and until January he was not seen in Mexico City.

But finally, out of a clear sky, he came. And with him came the report that all through Mexico there was discontent and opposition to the sending of so large an expedition, containing so many of the country's defenders, on the long and dangerous journey. The country was inhabited by hundreds of thousands of natives, most of whom felt keenly the yoke of Spanish rule, and who, despite their comparative quiet since the conquest of the country by Cortes, still were capable of revolt. It was not without reason, therefore, that many of the Spaniards did feel that the denuding of the country of its sparse growth of soldiers offered an opportunity for a serious uprising of the Indians. Gorgoza, hearing something of the discontent, hunted for it, and in the hunt created more, until, when he returned to the capital, his story needed but slight exaggeration, in order to appeal to the Viceroy as of grave significance.

Those in whom Mendoza trusted could, and often did, influence him even to the destruction, at

times, of wise and carefully laid plans. He had thrown himself energetically into the work of preparation that the forthcoming expedition demanded, and he realized, after a long talk with Gorgoza immediately after the officer's return, that his energies had been directed less to the work of government than to the work demanded by the expedition. Immediately his mind filled with many unfinished plans that the new work had pushed aside. He remembered that the road to Vera Cruz, that he had planned to repair, had not been touched and that it was rapidly becoming all but impassable—that public works about Mexico City had not received the attention they required—that necessary public buildings he had planned had not been built, and that countless other matters were at a standstill.

Gorgoza, seeing his advantage, impressed his superior with the serious situation that might face the country should the native uprising take place in the absence of the soldiers, and Mendoza, into whose mind the question fell so unexpectedly, was all the more impressed by it. It had not before occurred to him, and its import was apparent. It was not unlikely that, should the country be deprived of its protectors, the Indians would rise, and overpowering the handful of Spanish residents, bring to naught the work of twenty years.

The pendulum of the Viceroy's mind swung back under the subtle influence of Gorgoza's cunning.

Having entered so heartily into the preparations for the expedition's departure he swung the farther toward opposition to its leaving. An investigation must be begun at once, in order to determine the facts of the situation, and to stop, if need be, the start of the expedition or to lessen its numbers until enough remained behind to crush an uprising, should it develop.

So seriously did the Viceroy take the matter to be that he planned a trip to Compostela, there personally to inspect the personnel of the expedition, and together with Pero Almidez Cherino, the royal inspector of New Spain, to determine whether or not the situation demanded action.

But important matters held the Viceroy in Mexico City until the first of February, and before he could finally leave for Compostela Francisco's work at the capital was finished, and he, together with Fray Juan, Carlos, and Pedro, determined to accompany the Viceroy to Compostela.

* * * * *

The cares that the work of preparation had laid on the shoulders of Francisco and Carlos, together with the unsympathetic watchfulness with which Señora de Estrada had guarded Dolores and Isabella, had prevented the lovers from meeting except stealthily and at long intervals. Fray Juan had been able occasionally to make possible a few stolen minutes during the hours supposedly devoted

to study, and several meetings had taken place between Carlos and Isabella in the arbour, and between Francisco and Dolores on the old stone bench beneath the rose bush. But the duenna's sharp eye and the work thrust upon the two young men had made these stolen visits difficult and few.

However, the willing hand of the priest had borne many a note, and fewer hours were spent with studies than with long talks between the priest and his two pupils—and ever the subjects of the talks were the two cavaliers whose day of leaving on their adventure grew rapidly closer.

Juan came at last to meet the girls one morning with a serious expression on his face, and told them of the decision that had been made to leave for Compostela early on the following day. But a day remained in which to make ready—but a day in which to arrange a meeting that might be the last.

"Padre," said Dolores softly, when he had told them. "Go now and bring them to us. We shall wait here. I care not whether Señora de Estrada knows—nor yet whether my father knows, for we must see them ere they go. I care not what is said. My heart is given to Francisco, and 'twould kill me should he fail to bid me his farewell!"

The priest turned his furrowed face away, his eyes blurred as he looked out of the window on to the garden. Slowly they cleared, and he turned to Isabella.

"And you, my daughter," he said. "Do you feel as does Dolores?"

The girl's lip quivered, and tears came to her eyes, but she stood erect and looked up at him.

"Carlos is my life," she murmured. "I would not do what I should not, but it cannot be that he should leave without farewell to me."

"I shall send them," replied the priest.

It was scarcely ten minutes after the priest had left before the door opened, and the two young men entered, and scarcely had the door closed than it opened again, and Señora de Estrada stood upon the threshold.

"Dolores! Isabella!" she cried. "Come with me at once!"

The two girls were clasped in their lovers' arms when she spoke, and both of them, startled by her voice, half freed themselves and turned. For a moment neither spoke—merely gazing at the angry woman in the doorway.

"At once!" cried the duenna.

"Señora," replied Dolores, standing close beside Francisco and holding his hand, as his arm encircled her waist, "we will not go. You know me well, and when I say I will not, you know I will not. And too, I speak for Isabella. To-morrow the two to whom our hearts are given leave—perhaps forever, and gladly will we suffer from your anger—even from the anger of my father, rather than see them ride into the land of the unknown without a farewell from those who love them best."

Her black eyes flashed her resolve; with head

erect, and lips parted she faced the duenna, defiant, determined. Isabella, afraid, yet equally determined, clung to Carlos, and the duenna, realizing her defeat, shook her finger in solemn warning.

"I shall tell your father of this," she threatened, and turning, left the room. She pattered rapidly down the corridor, and reached the stairs.

"Señora," said a voice, as she started to descend.

She stopped and looked up. Juan was standing in the shadow of a niche.

"I know that you are angry with Dolores and Isabella," he said softly, "but do not act in haste."

"In haste!" she cried. "In haste! Have they not defied me? Have they not told me what they would and would not do? I shall tell His Excellency, that they may be punished."

"Then when you tell him," replied Juan, "say that it is I who am to blame."

"You?" repeated the duenna, amazed.

"Yes, I," returned Juan. "I could not help it, for I remember leaving Seville, when as a youth I thought to hew my way to fortune with the sword of a cavalier. I, too, loved a maiden, as like to Dolores as a maid could be, and her duenna would not let me say to her 'Farewell.' And when I had come back from the war to which I went—she was dead. It may be so with these lovers. Francisco and Carlos leave to-morrow for a new land, filled with dangers, from which neither of them may

return. I do not think it wrong that they should say good-bye to those they love."

The gaunt, serious face of the priest looked softly down at Señora de Estrada, as she stood on the step below him. She hesitated.

"They are lovers," he continued, "who are parting."

The duenna's eyes filled with tears, and one huge drop rolled down her nose, and hung, ridiculously, at its end.

"I, too, once had a lover," she replied, rubbing her eyes with her kerchief. "I almost had forgotten." And she turned and hurried back along the corridor to her room, and closed the door behind her.

The priest remained standing in the corridor, leaning against the tapestry-covered wall. Sunk in reverie he hardly noticed the passage of the minutes, and nearly an hour had slipped by before he was roused by the opening of the door of the recitation room, and heard Dolores speaking.

"It is a remembrance," he heard her say, as she and Francisco stepped into the corridor, "even as the jewel you've given me. Let me place it on your finger, and promise me that it shall stay there until we meet again."

He held out his hand, and she slipped a gold ring, carved with the crest of the Mendozas, on to his finger.

"I promise, chiquita mia," he replied. "I promise. And now, farewell."

Dolores stood beside her lover, and looked up into his face.

"My heart is yours, Francisco," she said, softly. "But never again shall we part, for when you have returned to me I shall be yours as well as is my heart. Farewell."

He took her in his arms, kissed her passionately, held her closely for a moment, and slowly released her.

"Carlos," he said, huskily, to his friend who had remained within the room. "Let us go."

There was a moment's pause, and presently Carlos stepped through the door, still holding Isabella's hand. He stopped, and she threw her arms about his neck.

"Carlos," she cried. "Carlos. I am afraid for you and me!"

She released him and the two friends walked slowly down the corridor to where Fray Juan was waiting at the head of the stairs. As they reached the priest they turned. Isabella was weeping, her slender form supported in Dolores' arms, her head on her friend's breast. Dolores was standing erect, her head high, her eyes untouched by tears, but with an expression on her features that showed the pain that lay within her heart.

Followed by the priest Francisco and Carlos walked slowly down the stairs, and as they disappeared from sight Dolores framed with her lips one unspoken word. "Farewell."

CHAPTER XIII

COMPOSTELA had lost its peaceful quiet. Four months before it had slumbered among the hills, all but untouched by the ambitions and jealousies and greed of the white conquerors—alone at the foot of the great and silent mountains, gazing peacefully upon the river that flowed quietly through the valley to mingle its cool freshness with the salt of the ever undulating sea. The peaceful natives had lived for half an age among the hills, had toiled amid their little plots of cultivated ground, had lived and died, and dying had been followed by their children, who, contented with their lot, had defended their homes against occasional marauders, and maintaining their position had never thought of conquest, of greed, or war, or domination.

The coming of the Spaniards had affected them but little. Satisfied that the newcomers were invincible, they rearranged their mode of life only so much as necessity had required, and still contented, went their daily round.

But the quiet had at last departed. The adventurers of all Mexico had congregated in the modest village. A thousand Indians, foreign to the valley,

were camped among the trees along the river. Three hundred Spaniards, rough and boisterous, tramped the crooked streets, or rode their horses madly here and there, heeding not the natives who crossed their paths, or heeding them, only flung them curses and rode on.

Herds of cattle and of sheep browsed among the open places, watched by native herdsmen, and waiting to accompany the expedition as a part of its supplies. Great stocks of soldiers' gear filled many of the rooms of the structure occupied by the garrison, and only the arrival of the captain-general was needed to complete the expedition.

Half of February of the year 1540 had passed before the Viceroy, accompanied by Francisco, Carlos, Fray Juan, Gorgoza, and a troop of minor officials and men-at-arms, arrived. Instantly the aimless activities of the village became well ordered. Packs were made up, arms and equipment were distributed, officers carefully inspected their companies, and the countless last preparations were made.

Don Pedro de Tovar, who had been appointed by the Viceroy as ensign-general of the expedition, had had command before the arrival of Francisco, and with Lope de Samaniego, the army master, had carefully built up the army, so that little remained to be done before the start.

But the Viceroy, still fearing that the departure of these able soldiers might bring on a native revolt,

planned to hold a grand review, in order that an accurate count of those who made up the departing body, might be obtained. February 21st was given as the day, the army was drawn up on a field beside the river, and the Viceroy, surrounded by a group of officials sat sternly on his horse in the shade of an old oak that for centuries had watched the progress of the peaceful valley. The sky was clear, save for a single snow-white cloud, that hung its brilliant mass above the snowy summits of the mountains to the east. Drawn by the review the wondering natives had gathered in the sunlight at the edge of a tongue of forest that ran down the side of a hill, where their brilliant blankets stood out like daubs of colour on a painter's palette.

The army was drawn up out of sight of the Viceroy's party, around a curve of the tree-lined river, awaiting the notes of the trumpet, which at the Viceroy's order would start their movement.

"Does Your Excellency feel confident," asked Gorgoza, as he rode up to Mendoza and bent over his saddle bow, "that Señor Cherino will be able to recognize all the members of the expedition?"

"He has been in Mexico for sixteen years," replied the Viceroy, "and furthermore, is being assisted by several others, all of whom have been here equally long. Neither are they depending merely upon this review to determine the membership of the army, but have, ever since our arrival at Compostela, been going about among the com-

pany, learning what they could of each individual. Already they have told me that unless many whom they have not seen are to be found among the expedition there is no danger in allowing the army to depart, for it is made up for the most part of men newly arrived from Spain and of unsettled adventurers who have never remained fixed, and have consequently been of little help in maintaining our hold on the natives."

"But it may be," returned Gorgoza, "that there will be many who, knowing Your Excellency's opposition to their departure, will fail to show their faces to-day, but who at the last moment, will join the expedition, and leave the country with it."

"You give me singularly little credit," replied Mendoza sharply, somewhat angered at Gorgoza's insistence, "for being able to foresee such a possibility. I have already ordered that the name of every Spaniard who passes before me to-day be taken, and Don Francisco is to allow none but those who to-day are present to accompany him. Should there be any they are to be turned back, or left in chains at Culiacan.

"But we have talked enough. Order the trumpeter to sound his call."

Gorgoza, rebuffed by the sharpness of the Viceroy's answer, and ordered away so abruptly, bowed stiffly over his saddle bow again, and wheeling his horse trotted off to where the trumpeter stood with a group of men-at-arms.

"Sound the call," ordered Gorgoza as he approached.

The man put his trumpet to his lips and blew a long clear call. In answer a corps of trumpeters that was drawn up at the head of the army sounded the reply. Slowly the column got under way, and wound its way into sight from its position behind the trees at the river bend.

Sixteen trumpeters first appeared, riding eight abreast, and sounding their notes as they advanced, their horses prancing and curveting across the field. They had ridden a hundred yards or more, the object of all eyes before another rider followed. Then, with the sunlight flashing on his burnished armour, with his helmeted head erect, and its plume waving in the breeze, with his horse covered with brilliant trappings and curveting as he came, appeared Don Francisco Vasquez de Coronado, Captain-General.

A murmur of surprise broke from the gathering of Indians, and they stood in open-eyed astonishment as the flashing figure advanced, followed by Pedro, who bore aloft a silken banner embroidered with the device of the Coronados. Then around the turn appeared a group of horsemen, headed by Fray Juan, whose sombre garb contrasted sharply with the flashing array that accompanied him.

Clad in polished armour rode Francisco's friend, Don Carlos de Ulloa, and by his side Don Pedro de Tovar, while following came a group of gentlemen

attached to the captain-general. Don Alonso Manrique de Lara rode there, and Don Lope de Urrea, and with them came Gomez Suarez de Figueroa, Luis Ramirez de Vargas, Juan de Sotomayor, Francisco Gorbalan, and a dozen others.

They advanced on to the field, their polished armour breaking the sunlight into a thousand flashing rays, their horses prancing and tossing their heads. Then followed the companies of men-at-arms, led by their captains. First came Lope de Samaniego, the army master, and following him was Pablo de Melgosa of Burgos, captain of the infantry, behind whom marched his men, bearing polished halberds. Don Tristan de Arellano followed at the head of the crossbowmen, who carried their heavy weapons over their shoulders. Don Pedro de Guevara came with another company of infantry, and Don Garcia Lopez de Cardenas with a company of musketeers. Then followed Diego Lopez and Diego Gutierres, each followed by a company of cavalry, clad in half armour, their burnished steel casques and breastplates dull beside the flashing armour of their leaders, their saddle bags filled with gear, their swords swinging against the flanks of their great mounts.

The line of advance already filled the field, and the trumpeters that led had passed from sight behind a screen of trees when the artillery finally lumbered into sight. Hernando de Alvarado was at its head, his giant form on his great black horse,

seemingly twice the size of the mounted men-at-arms who followed him. Clad in black armour, that caught no reflected ray of sunlight, he stood out plainly among the flashing array. His great helm was decorated with three black plumes, that waved solemnly in the breeze, and his mount, broad of back and heavy of neck, lifted its hairy hoofs heavily, and set them powerfully in the yielding earth. Drawn by their heavy limbed horses the polished brass guns slowly followed, sinking their wheels deep in the black soil. Silently they rolled past six brass barrels gleaming, twelve great horses straining, thirty armoured artillerymen, serious of mien, following the brilliant array that had gone before, until at last they passed from sight behind the trees that marked the end of the field.

The review was over, and the Viceroy, without a word, rode back to his quarters, solemnly followed by the group of officials that had surrounded him. He dismounted, turned his mount over to an attendant, and asked for Cherino. It was half an hour before the man could be found, and when at last he came, he was led to the Viceroy, who sat alone on a bench outside the building—the very bench that Carlos and Francisco had occupied when they had heard the old Indian tell his story.

“Ah, Señor Cherino,” said the Viceroy, as the inspector approached. “What is your decision as to those who make up the expedition?”

“We have carefully looked into the matter, Your

Excellency," replied Cherino, bowing, "and have found but two of the citizens of Mexico among the army. One, Alonso Sanchez by name, has been for several years a provision dealer, buying at wholesale and selling at retail. But he has always been in very great need, having nothing on which to live, and he gave as his reason for going that he must go some place in search of a living. The other is the army master, Señor Lopez de Samaniego, whom Your Excellency has himself appointed.

"Other than these, Your Excellency, we have found none among the army that you may need to call upon as citizens of Mexico. Many are restless young men who have but recently come from Spain, and being unemployed have led lives that have been harmful to themselves and to the citizens of the country."

"You are sure then, señor," returned the Viceroy, showing his satisfaction by a twinkle in his eye, "that we shall run no risk of a native uprising should these men depart on this long journey?"

"I am certain, Your Excellency," replied Cherino, "that even without them we shall be in a good way to repress a revolt."

"I am pleased," said the Viceroy. "It is as I had hoped. And may I ask that you inform Don Francisco that I wish to see him here."

Cherino bowed, swept off his hat and departed, and behind the bush that once had sheltered Gor-

goza's spy a figure moved and silently stole away.
Gorgoza was outdone.

* * * * *

The dawn of February 22nd of the year 1540 broke clear and cloudless, but even before the first pale streaks of light broke across the snowy summits to the east the men of the expedition were about. Horses were saddled, packs were made up, supplies were gathered from every corner of the crowded town. Along the narrow street through which the busy traffic of the four previous months had passed, the gear of the army was collected. Horses stood beside the houses; in the square was gathered the ammunition and the guns of the artillery train; in the field on which the review of the preceding day had been held, flocks of sheep and cattle were assembled. The preparations for the departure were finished.

From the belfry of the stone church that thrust its tower above the black pines of the hilltop broke the clanging of bells, and instantly the activities of the army ceased. Horses were tethered where they stood, and every Spaniard of the expedition wound his way in answer to the call that floated from the church tower. Solemn mass was held, and as the men departed from the church they were called to hear the Viceroy's parting words.

Gathered before the building that was occupied by the garrison, the Spaniards awaited Mendoza's

coming, and when at last he stood before them silence fell over the armed men that stood there. Among the trees were the awed and interested natives of the village, standing in open-eyed astonishment at the quiet throng of Spaniards that for three months past had been so boisterous.

The sun had cast its first ray through a mountain pass, and touched by the golden light that threw long shadows on the ground, the village lay in silence. Only here and there a horse stamped or a dog barked, and these sounds but accentuated the stillness that had fallen over the populous village. As the Viceroy appeared, he stood for a moment gazing over the assembly before him. The polished armour of yesterday was gone; no plumes adorned the casques of the gentlemen; no scarlet and gold trappings adorned the horses. Dull and drab the army had become. Only the silk embroidered banners flashed a ray of colour among the group of Spaniards, and even they, as they hung in motionless folds, seemed less brilliant than when on the previous day they had waved in the bright sunlight as they crossed the field.

At last the Viceroy spoke.

"You are about to leave," he said, "to go to an unknown land where danger may await you. You will be far from help, should you require it, and only upon yourselves can you rely. Should you for any reason fail to give your leader the honest aid that is his due, disaster may befall you. I have

great hopes for your success, but I know that many unforeseen dangers may arise. Your captain-general is one in whom I trust. But gentlemen and men-at-arms alike, I wish you all to swear before you leave—to swear on your honour as soldiers, that whatever may arise, always will you support and obey your captain-general, Don Francisco Vasquez de Coronado."

The Viceroy paused, and silence fell again upon the men before him. For a moment no one moved, then Fray Juan, tall and gaunt, and arrayed in burnished breastplate and casque worn with his drab priest's costume, stepped from the group of gentlemen who had surrounded him.

"Your Excellency," he said, his deep voice carrying plainly to the outermost man of the throng. "We raise our hands and swear!" He stopped and held his great hand above his head, and solemnly each man of those who surrounded him, raised his hand. "We swear," continued the priest, "to support our captain-general, to obey his every order—even to give our lives should he so command. On our honour as men and soldiers do we swear!"

He paused and dropped his hand to his side, while the three hundred men about him held their hands aloft a moment longer, and repeated slowly, "We swear!"

An hour later a twisting line of soldiers interspersed with baggage trains and cattle, with native bearers and native troops and sheep, led by Fran-

cisco de Coronado and Carlos de Ulloa, wound slowly through the hills to the land of the unknown, and as the last of the long column left the village, a hurrying rider galloped across the plain, and passing the slowly moving army, drew up his lathered horse beside its leaders. He swept off a dusty hat.

"Your Excellencies," he said. "I have but just come from Mexico City, to bear to you a note."

He drew from his wallet a letter, which he passed to the youthful general who, followed by Carlos, drew his horse up at the edge of the road. With rapidly beating heart Francisco broke the seal, as Carlos leaned from his horse to see.

"To Francisco and to Carlos," they read, and in the sunlight of the early morning with the baggage trains and soldiery filing past, they read the letter and saw that it was signed by Dolores and by Isabella.

CHAPTER XIV

TO THE west and south of Mexico lay the Great South Sea—a sea across which the Spaniards knew there lay a way that led through many dangers and strange lands back again to Spain. But of the vastness of that sea and of the lands that bordered it they had no knowledge.

Of the western coast of Mexico they knew a little, but of the continent of which Mexico is a part they knew nothing. They thought the long and slender peninsula we know as Lower California to be an island, separated from the mainland by the Gulf of California, for which they had no name, and the land to the north was lost in the mists of distant obscurity. Forty years remained to pass ere Sir Francis Drake landed on the coast of California to claim it for his Queen.

And so it was that Hernando de Alarcon sailed from Acapulco to the north along a coast he did not know, to aid an expedition that had marched unguided to the north. From Acapulco de Alarcon sailed to the mouth of the river on which lay Compostela, and learning that the expedition had left a month or more before, he hurried on, and stopped at river mouths and at small inlets, always alert to

hear some news of Coronado and his army. At Culiacan, the farthest Spanish outpost toward the land of the unknown, de Alarcon added the *San Gabriel* to his fleet, and learning that the expedition had left but a week before for the north, he sailed again, confident that soon he would have learned its whereabouts.

He sailed from the open sea into the Gulf of California, and sailed yet farther, stopping here and there, and inquiring always, but without result. To the east he saw great mountains, that lay but a little distance from the shore, and as he sailed ever farther to the north he came at last to waters so restricted that mountains towered above them to the west as well as to the east, but always he sailed on.

His tiny ships were tossed and troubled by adverse winds and currents that set forever in the way he wished the least to go, but urged forward by the spirit of de Alarcon the ships moved determinedly on.

Three months had passed since they had left Compostela, and still they spread their sails to catch each breeze that moved them to the north, and dropped their anchors to hold the gains they made when wind and current conspired against them, and still no word had come to them of Coronado and his band. And then, at last, the tiny ships approached shoal waters, and found their way completely barred by shifting banks of sand, across

which the tide ran in and out. And here they anchored.

But de Alarcon was undismayed. In his small boat he searched carefully, and found a channel cut by currents through the shifting shoals. Waiting for the tide to flow he sailed through it with his ships, and found himself unable to go farther, for beyond the shoals he found that the gulf had reached its end, and now instead of salt sea water he faced the mighty current of a river.

So great a river he had not seen before in all of Mexico, and against its mighty rush of water his ships could make no headway. But his work had not been finished, for somewhere in the unknown land that lay, perhaps, along the river, was the army he had been sent to aid—the army that for months had been in this great land among such dangers as no one could guess—that might require his help against some powerful enemy he knew not of. But his ships could go no farther, and his little band of sailors dared not risk the dangers of the strange interior, lest they, in search of Coronado's band, might perish—their work undone.

But the river—its broad waters could not but lead far into the interior, where news of Coronado might be found. There lay the route that must be traveled.

Four small boats were made ready. Laden with gifts for the natives, and manned by volunteers, they left the fleet of tiny ships, and rowed bravely

up the stream, the first white men to see the river that we call the Colorado.

For three weeks they toiled against the current, sometimes aided by the natives of the region, who, marveling at the white men who rode strangely appareled in canoes, offered their help and towed the boats upstream by lines led to the shore. Sometimes the Spaniards rowed, and sometimes talked, by means of signs, to the natives. And always they were told that never before had white men come into that country, but that messengers had come from some vague land through which the river flowed, and told them of strangers who had come with great animals upon whose backs they sat, who carried strange sticks that breathed smoke and fire and spoke with dreadful voices, at which their enemies fell dead.

The first of these stories was told to de Alarcon after three weeks had been spent on the toilsome journey—when the party's supplies were all but gone, and the energy of the men was flagged. The stories of the natives were vague, the land to which they referred was distant, and the difficulties of traveling through the country were all but insurmountable for so few men. The handful of Spaniards, if they risked the attempt, if they could overcome the dangers of heat and thirst, would surely fall victims to the natives.

De Alarcon debated the question. Should he make the attempt alone and lose, no one would

know of it, and his ships, after waiting perhaps for months, would return to Mexico and report his failure. But the current of the great river was swift, and his supplies were nearly gone. He could return and make the trip again, with more men and more supplies, his chances of success better—and the news he had, he could leave with his second in command, that his failure might result in nothing worse than his own death and the death of the men who accompanied him.

Three days it took to return the distance it had taken three weeks to come; and in three more days the reënforced party started back. Again the natives aided them, and again the Spaniards made their slow progress against the current. They toiled early and late, sometimes rowing, sometimes towing their boats along the banks, sometimes talking with the natives who told them more vague stories of the strange visitors who were far in the interior.

Another three weeks passed, and they had reached and passed the point from which they had previously turned back. The river became more boisterous. Rapids and eddies made their progress more difficult. The natives became less friendly, and the party was forced to spend the nights in their boats, with guards set to prevent attack. The stories of the Spaniards in the interior became stranger and more strange, until their falsity was evident. But the determination of de Alarcon never changed.

Against the tumbling rapids he urged his men. They dragged the boats over rocks, and risked their lives in the foaming torrent, and came at last to a cañon, through which the river foamed and roared in never ending fury.

The party stopped to rest, while their indomitable leader went ahead on foot to see what lay between the lofty walls. He stumbled over the rocks, and gazed at the foaming flood, through which great boulders thrust their granite heads, to catch the spray that they themselves had caused. The gorge rose high on either side, hundreds of feet above the river, its sides seamed by the erosion of the ages, devoid of growth, difficult to climb. And standing on the summit of a mesa that reared its head five hundred feet above the stream that swept its foot, de Alarcon admitted his defeat.

For two days the party remained, watching the ever restless colours of the gorge, as they slowly changed in the shifting lights and shadows of the day, or turned to black and gold beneath the moon at night. Here and there a tortuous way was found that led up to the plateau through which the gorge was cut, and the Spaniards, gazing down upon their boats, marveled at the greatness of the river and the cañon, never dreaming that the gorge on which they gazed was but a petty thing—a toy compared with a greater one that lay beyond. The cliffs that fell abruptly five hundred feet or more and slowly changed their colours in the sunlight,

were marvels far beyond the ken of those who had not seen, and no imagination even of these Spaniards could picture that other cañon farther up this selfsame river, and as yet unseen by white men, where the walls stood thousands of feet where these stood hundreds—where the snow lay cold upon the topmost edges of the precipices, while flowers bloomed brightly in the warmth and protection at their feet; where mesas similar to these that lay about them, in everything save size, towered a mile above the foaming river which from their summits seemed to be a tiny silver ribbon as it twinkled in the sunlight; where great bands of colour striped the rocks in belts of brilliant hues, even as the colours striped the cañon walls of the gorge these wanderers had found. Five hundred feet of rocky wall stood above them where their boats had stopped—five thousand feet of rocky wall towered between the river and the sky in that vastest of all cañons that lay another hundred miles upstream.

But of that they could not know, and convinced at last of the futility of further effort they sat in their boats and drifted down the stream again, dispirited and depressed as they thought of the proud expedition that had marched off to the north—that even now might be dying in that great and burning desert through which the mighty river cut its way.

The winds and currents that had opposed the

northward passage of the fleet sped it on its homeward way, and a month after the little ships had crossed the bar at the mouth of the great river they anchored in the harbour at Acapulco. Without the delay of a single day de Alarcon set out for Mexico City, to lay before the Viceroy the story of his adventures and his failure.

* * * * *

"How far to the north," asked the Viceroy across his study table at the close of de Alarcon's story, "did you penetrate?"

"'Tis difficult to judge, Your Excellency," replied de Alarcon. "The irregularities of the coast and of the river may make it appear to be much farther than it is. But I believe that the cañon into which we could not go is five hundred leagues from here."

"Five hundred leagues," repeated the Viceroy. "The distance is great. And you found no signs of the land that the expedition went to seek?"

"None, Your Excellency."

"And you say that the river that you found could not be crossed by the expedition?"

"No, Your Excellency," replied the sailor. "It would be difficult even for the men without their baggage and supplies. With their horses, their artillery, and their cattle they could not, even without the difficulties created by the chasm through which it flows. For should they reach the river

where it flows through the cañon they would find its rocky walls five times as high as is the great pyramid at Cholula, and through this enormous height the rocks rise so abruptly that in many places there is no foothold." He pointed to a paper that lay upon the table. "This drawing I have brought," he continued, "shows the greatness of the gorge. A priest who was with my party drew it to show the difficulties in our way. Only here and there are there steep and dangerous slopes up which a man might climb."

He stopped, and gazed at the old man before him. The study was in semi-darkness, and the shadows seemed to accentuate the furrows on Mendoza's brow. He sat leaning back in his great oaken chair, one hand on the arm, the other stretched before him on the table, on the dark surface of which the long, thin fingers lightly drummed.

"You have done well, de Alarcon," he said at last, his eyes still staring at the dim reflected light upon the polished oak before him. "You have done well. But I fear for Francisco and his men. His expedition is strong, but he is youthful. The land you tell me of is strange, and I fear that there are difficulties he cannot overcome. I would that he were here, and that the expedition had never left."

He paused and folding up the drawing placed it in a chest that stood beside his desk.

"You have done well, de Alarcon,—" he nodded his head, gazing with unseeing eyes at the darkness of the wall, "but I would be alone with my thoughts. Buenos noches, de Alarcon. Buenos—noches."

CHAPTER XV

FOR thirty days Coronado led his army along the little used trails of New Galicia, winding among the foothills of the mountain range that lay to the east along their route. Over open plains and through woodland, across valleys and swollen streams, along tree lined forest aisles where strange birds whistled and sang above their heads, the long line of adventurers wended their optimistic way. For thirty days they marched to the north, and reached at last the farthest outpost of the Spanish rule—Culiacan, a little village of crude dwellings where a Spanish officer and his men swayed an effortless rule over the mild and peaceful natives of the valley.

During all the march there had been no hardships, no difficulties, no disappointments, and anxious to leave behind them the known in their search for the great unknown the expedition desired but little time for rest. Two weeks they tarried, impatient to be once more upon their way, and finally marched again to the north as the rising sun broke the shadows of the valley into shifting shades, and rose in brilliant splendour above the mountain tops.

The thirty days had taught the Spaniards many

of the milder lessons of campaigning. No longer were they loaded down with unnecessary impedimenta. No more did they fancy the gaudy trifles of dress and armour with which they had left Compostela. Behind them in Culiacan remained the useless trifles that had seemed too precious to part with a month before, and into the threatening land of the unknown marched a hardened and sinewy army, ready to fight its way against whatever hordes of warriors it might be called upon to face.

Rumour told them that the Seven Cities of Cibola lay ahead of them—in a land where gold and precious stones abounded, where mighty chieftains with great armies would dispute with them as they advanced to conquer, where temples and palaces more rich than had been those of Mexico would give up their wealth to any one who had the strength to force it from them.

But ahead of them lay dangers more to be feared than warriors fighting to defend their homes—more terrible than battle, more dreadful even than the danger of being sacrificed on some blood bespattered altar to some bloodthirsty god. But unsuspecting and unprepared, the expedition marched on and on, reaching farther and ever farther toward the parched and desolate land that lay before them.

Here and there small bands of natives, wiry and hostile and ferocious, struck suddenly from ambush at the unprotected stragglers. They stamped

the cattle in the night, and ran them wildly along the arroyos and the beds of dried up streams. They preceded the slowly marching column, and stirred up the mud in the water holes that lay ahead. They lay in wait in narrow passes, and rolled great stones down on the cumbered bearers as they passed.

But the difficulties were not insurmountable, and the hurts that were received at the hands of the natives but served to sting the expedition into greater zeal and activity. A rear guard kept off the forays that were aimed against the stragglers, and an active band of horsemen drove the fleet footed natives back among the rocks and cactus where the horses could not follow, and on to the north the army marched, into a land that grew more desolate and forbidding with every league, more dry, more arid, more sparse of vegetation.

Almost without the knowledge of its leaders the army had advanced through a valley that had broadened as it ran among the foothills, had sloped gradually up, until it ended on a plateau, from which the mountain tops seemed lower, and as the expedition kept on toward the north the peaks faded away upon the east, and gradually grew upon the west, until a wall of summits lined the western horizon, and when the army would have turned to reach toward the sea there was no path, and without retracing their steps for forty leagues they could not pass the mountains.

"We have been told," said Francisco one even-

ing as he sat beside his camp-fire with half a dozen of his captains, "that Cibola lies to the north. If we return in order to pass around the mountains and follow the coast it seems to me that we shall probably find ourselves cut off from Cibola as we are now cut off from the sea. But Cibola is our destination, not the sea, and all we have to gain by retracing our steps is to meet with the ships of de Alarcon, whose help we seem not to require."

And so the army marched on again across the desert into which they had come, hoping ever to find some sign that they had reached its farther edge, and had come to the land of gold and jewels for which they sought.

The sun in May beat down upon their heads from out a cloudless sky. Snakes with rattles on their tails, and toads with horns dragged themselves across the dusty path of the advancing army, or sat in ugly silence on sunbaked ridges where the cactus grew. The water holes lay farther and farther apart, and squads of horsemen were sent to scour the plain to prevent missing even the tiniest of these priceless treasures.

But on across the desert the expedition marched. The cattle grew thinner and more thin, and staggered crazily ahead of the parched natives who drove them. They dropped here and there of exhaustion, and died, with no one to interest themselves in the loss. The sheep, pricked by the thorns of countless cacti, which, catching in the wool re-

fused to cease their torture, bled piteously and staggered on and dropped upon the burning waste, to gasp for breath in the stifling air, to bleat again and die.

Horses, stone bruised and famished, dropped of exhaustion, and their riders sinking to the ground sat looking at their fallen mounts, and taking fresh hold upon their wills, arose again, and staggered forward through the heat, to cry with joy at each new water hole as it was found, and to fall upon their faces and drink, not noticing that horses and sheep and cattle and men, were crowded about the pool. And having drunk to excess they ceased to drink, and presently they rolled upon the ground and died, tortured and in agony.

But finally the desert grew less arid, and the water holes become more frequent, with here and there an oasis of cool shade, and luscious grass, of which the weakened animals ate until they too suffered from their excesses and grew more weak instead of stronger. But as the weakened army crawled farther to the north they came at last into a valley, through which there ran a stream, bordered by shrubs that were dusty from the dust blown out of the desert, but which sheltered the ground beneath from the heat of the sun. And here the army camped.

Half way across the desert the cannon had been abandoned, their brass barrels hot in the sun, and reflecting back its brilliant rays. Along the path

that had been followed were the remains of cattle, of horses and of sheep, sometimes still recognizable for what they once had been, but more often merely heaps of whitened bones, from which the vultures and the skulking coyotes had removed the last remaining shreds of flesh. Here and there a tiny mound of stones marked the spot where some Spaniard had died, and where his companions had buried him, with his sword standing with its point thrust into the dry soil to mark his resting place. Scattered more often here and there were the grinning skulls and scattered bones of perished natives, for whom no one dug graves—of whom nobody thought.

But at last the expedition had reached a haven, after crossing the parched desert. With the cool waters of the stream, and the foliage and grass along its banks, they soon regained the strength that had faded from them in the heat, and became once more the optimistic adventurers that they had been three months before.

"Carlos," said Francisco to his companion, as they sat together in the cool evening on the second day after their arrival at the stream, "for a time I lost my courage. I could not bear to see the suffering of the men and of the animals as we crossed the desert—not because I saw that it was suffering, for I have seen that ere this on battle fields in Spain and France whereon the wounded cried in agony, but because these men and animals were dying all

because I led them here. Had I not seen the opals that we found at Compostela there would have been no expedition to this awful country, and the thirty Spaniards and the five score natives who lie dead behind us in the desert would still be living men. And for all of that I am to blame."

"You are not to blame," replied Carlos. "Had it not been you who first heard of this land, then it would have been another, and this same march would have been made, and in the desert other dead men would remain to mark the path they followed. The blame is not for you, for men are all alike, and the wealth we hope to find will always be a lure, until some one has taken it or proved it but a dream."

"You speak God's truth, Carlos," muttered a deep voice from behind the two, and Fray Juan, who in his sandaled feet had approached the pair unheard, sat down beside them. "Gold will always lure mankind. Cover the path that leads to it with a thousand dangers, each more great than is the desert we have crossed, and still there will be men to risk their lives in making the attempt, and some there will be always to succeed.

"I, too, feel guilty for the deaths of those who lie behind us in the silence, for it was I who first suggested to Francisco the possibility of such a journey, and each time that I absolved an erring soul before it parted from its tortured body, and lay another corpse to rest beneath its mound of rocks, or left

it to the mercies of the vultures and the wolves, I felt a growing weight upon my soul, and felt that I, at least in part, was guilty of a crime.

“And yet I feel that in the sight of God these deaths are not my crimes, nor yet the crimes of you, into whose mind I dropped the seed that has resulted in this enterprise. For man is always man, and drawn as ever by the lure of wealth, he laughs to scorn the dangers that await him, and even in the face of death he makes his way.

“And you, Francisco, risked the death that those behind us suffered, for many a time I saw you, as we staggered through the heat, give to some sufferer a little of the water that you carried, and go without yourself, until your tongue went black for want of it. And your great mount, whose strength held good, carried others than yourself for many a league of the dreary way, while you, still weighted with your armour, which you refused to throw away, walked painfully beside him, and holding to the stirrup, held up your head, that others might take note and hold up theirs.

“And Carlos—of all the hundreds who had strength to struggle through, and reach at last this haven, it was you, who seeing a native herdsman, too weak to drag himself another hundred yards to reach the water that would save his life, retraced your steps, and dragged him forward till he lay beside the pool, and bathed his face, and dropped the cooling water on his tongue, and when he finally

had strength enough to move, you held him, that he might not drink too much, and perish.

"These things I saw, and others. For there are men in this great company of ours whose chivalry has never been outmatched—who risked their lives against an enemy at whom they could not strike, and became far greater heroes through the saving of the lives of others, than ever they could become through slaying.

"And it is men of such a type who will some day have conquered all this land—who will have overcome its terrors, and wrung from out the soil its gold—who will build up in the mighty land to which we now are coming, a country that will teem with wealth and happiness, where smiling valleys and happy villages will cover all the leagues that lie before us, and when that time has come they will remember and revere the ones who went before and gave their lives that this great country might be known. For while we are the first to come here from the outside world, remember we are but the first. Where we have led there will be many others who will follow, and well spent indeed will be the lives that all of this will cost."

The priest stopped and the three sat silent, as the lurid edge of the full moon rose slowly above a hill to the east. In the stillness of the evening the only sounds that floated to them were the contented munching of their horses as they browsed, and the subdued sound of voices from the scattered camp.

Here and there a tired man-at-arms rolled himself in his blanket and fell asleep. Here and there a campfire, built for the evening meal, smoldered in its embers. A coyote, moving as silently as a shadow across the hill before the moon, sat on his haunches for a moment and sent his shrill, wavering cry to echo mournfully amid the silence, and disappeared as he had come. The moon climbed above the horizon, its lurid red fading as it rose, until, as it hung among the stars that sparkled in the blackness overhead, it shone with all the seeming of a disk of palest brass.

For an hour or more the three had sat in silence, and, at last, Fray Juan arose and lay his hand affectionately on Francisco's shoulder.

"The difficulties seem less great when they are passed," he said, "and nothing that we have is worth the having, if it has cost us nothing."

He waited for no reply, and walked away, his footsteps muffled in the grass as he disappeared among the shadows.

CHAPTER XVI

FOR a week the expedition rested, and then moved on, following a valley. For two days they marched without seeing a sign of any native inhabitants, but on the third day they saw, on a distant hilltop, a group of Indians, who watched the slowly moving army for a time and disappeared. A mounted party was sent to follow them, and returned later in the day, to report that the natives have been followed among the hills to another valley, three or four leagues distant, where they had been lost.

The army camped for the night, and in the morning, changed its course. They marched across the intervening hills, and found themselves, that afternoon, in a wider richer valley, in which there were tiny scattered plots of cultivated ground. Here and there they came upon a hut, from which the inhabitants had departed but a little while before, for at least one camp fire's ashes still held the warmth of fire.

For two days more the army marched, through scattered patches of tilled ground and past recently deserted huts, and as the setting sun of the second day threw long shadows to the east they rounded a

low hill and saw far down the valley a great mesa, that stood boldly up above the valley that lay about it. Alone it stood, a silent sentinel—an outpost of the high plateau that spread its broken edge along the skyline to the north. The sinking sun threw its shadow far across the valley, and etched in brilliant lights and shades its rugged outlines. Flat of top, it stood in silent majesty as if it were an island looking down upon a great expanse of quiet, sunlit sea.

The head of the column stopped to gaze in wonder at the view, and as they gazed they saw a tiny line of moving figures—figures so small in the sunlit distance that except for their movement they could not have been detected—saw them wind across the face of the great mesa, saw them slowly mount along a path that in the distance seemed to be the merest scratch upon the mighty rock, and saw them finally reach the top, and disappear from sight.

Carlos and Francisco sat silent on their horses, unable for the moment to grasp what they had seen.

"Carlos," said Francisco at last, his voice quivering with excitement. "Did you not see? Across the face of that great cliff there lies a path. Upon that mountain top must lie the city of the old man's tale."

The news ran back through all the expedition, and, thrilled by it, every man straightened his tired back, glanced at his weapons, and bright of eye

waited impatiently for the commands of the captain-general.

Farther down the valley a stream cut across their path, and beside it the army made its camp. More compact it was than those of the weary weeks preceding, and posted about it were sentinels, alert to hear and quick to act. A change had come upon the men. No more were heard the grumblings of the weeks just past. No more did the visionless voice their endless tales of woe, and here and there about the camp happy groups of men-at-arms gathered about bright camp fires, and sang the songs of sunny Spain, and retold stories of the Conqueror, who, marching at the head of a tiny and ill-prepared army, had sacked the richest city of the great New World.

Far into the night they talked, and not a man in all the company but looked forward to the morrow, and saw already the gold, the jewels, the wealth and power, the honour and the glory that would be his.

Slowly the camp grew quieter. Here and there the men-at-arms wrapped themselves in their blankets, and tired with the exertion and excitement of the day lay down to dream. Camp fire after camp fire glowed less brightly in the clear, cool night, and ceased to flame. The embers glowed; and thin and straight the smoke rose high above them, wavering slightly in the faint breaths of air—melting at last into the pale light of the star-strewn heavens.

One camp-fire alone remained alight, and grouped about it were the captains and their captain-general. A silence had fallen on them, and thoughtfully they sat about the fire, gazing at the flames, their brows furrowed, their faces thoughtful. The camp was quiet now, and hardly a sound broke the stillness, save here and there the rattle of a sentry's armour as he paced his beat, or the contented breathing of the horses as they munched the grass along the stream. At last Francisco raised his eyes and gazed about him at the thoughtful circle.

"I have listened to you, señors," he said slowly. "It seems that we have almost reached the goal for which we sought. Closely—very closely, does the story as it was told to me seem to fit with our own travels, and though a hundred years have passed since this valley was approached by the man who told me of it, still does his story hold good.

"On yonder mountain, that stands so boldly up against the sky beneath the stars must lie the city we have come to find. We have found it, but as yet we have not taken it. We must learn more ere we essay the attempt.

"Our camp will remain here, and on the morrow we shall send a message to the city. It may be that we can gain an entrance without a battle—if not, as Spaniards we will force our way. But we have come too great a distance and suffered far too much to make our plans too hurriedly. On the

morrow, señors, it may be that we shall learn much that will be of help to us.

"Buenos noches, señors."

* * * * *

With the first faint light of dawn Francisco was up, and long before the camp was awake he had left it and walked far out upon the plain toward the mesa. In the east the sky had just begun to change to gray, contrasting faintly with the blackness still covering the earth. The outlines of the horizon to the north were all but obscured, and the mesa seemed but another shadow in the shadows.

A light breeze fanned across the valley, and Francisco shivered and drew his cape more closely about him. A rabbit, startled by his approach, darted suddenly away from beneath a bush where it had taken shelter, the sound of its feet loud in the silence of the dawn.

Slowly the light in the east grew. The faint gray brightened into gold. Overhead the stars faded away, and the blackness of the sky changed to blue. Blurred shadows became rocks and hills, strange shapes, unrecognizable in the darkness, trees and bushes. The gold in the east turned to primrose, the primrose to red, and finally the sun, with its thousand dazzling rays, slowly rose above the eastern hills, and as it rose, the morning star faded in the west and disappeared.

Francisco paused, and sat upon a rock that was

wet with dew. Behind him lay his camp, from which the sounds of the early morning activities drifted now and then to where he sat. Before him lay the city he had come to find—the city that was to give him fame and wealth. And even more than that—here lay the city that would give to him the means whereby he could ask and obtain the hand of the maid he loved—the maid who at that moment was before her crucifix, her prayer unsaid, but in her heart a great vague longing, that was itself a prayer.

Little could be seen of the city from the mesa. The irregular outline of buildings, indistinct in the distance, and merely suggestive of what lay about them—the bold shape of one central structure that rose a little above the others, and that was all, save for the figures of the inhabitants, tiny as they appeared at the edge of the great rock, gathered to gaze upon the camp that lay in the valley.

Francisco rose to his feet, stood for a moment, and turning, walked back to the camp. He went to his tent, and sent for Fray Juan and Carlos.

"I am anxious," he said when they had arrived, "to send an envoy to the city to-day, bidding it surrender. If they refuse, our task will be difficult, but we will force our way up those great walls, and seize the place for His Majesty the King."

"Then send me," suggested Fray Juan.

"Nay," returned Francisco. "I shall not send you. It is probable that no enemy has ever yet been

able to force that city, and the natives, not fearing an attack, may treat our envoy as they did the captives the old man told us of. I could not allow you to take that risk, for you are far too valuable to the expedition. Nor would I risk you, Carlos," he continued as he saw his friend about to speak. "I shall speak to all my officers, and should Alvarado ask to go I shall send him. Clad in his armour he is the finest soldier in this whole army, and seeing him may cause our friends in the city to think twice before they refuse to receive us."

An hour later Alvarado left the camp. Delighted that of the score of volunteers he had been chosen, he donned his black armour, and with a mounted attendant carrying his helm, on the crest of which waved the three black plumes that in some strange manner had come unharmed through all the journey from Compostela, he mounted his great horse, and set out for the mesa. Cheer after cheer echoed across the valley as the assembled army watched him depart, and as he left the camp behind him every eye eagerly watched his progress.

Slowly and deliberately he made his way across the open, in plain sight of the throng that had collected at the edge of the mesa, and of the army with which he had come, his heavy sword swinging against his horse's flank, his great form upright in the saddle. To those in the camp he seemed to grow smaller and yet smaller, and when at last he had ridden up the slope to the foot of the path that

led across the face of the rock he had become hardly more than a black shape in the sunlight.

He dismounted and placing his helm upon his head, turned his horse over to his attendant. Armed only with his sword he began the ascent. Eagerly a thousand pair of eyes from the camp beside the stream watched him as he ascended. Slowly he toiled along the way, visible now in the sunlight, lost then in the shadows, but reappearing, and climbing ever up. Above him the natives clustered along the edge of the precipice, unable to understand—curious, half fearing, but making no effort to stop him in his progress. On and on he climbed, his armour heavy upon him, and the steep path forcing him to draw upon his great reserve of strength, until finally he reached the last turn, and had but another hundred yards to go. From the camp in the valley his black form seemed tiny in the distance as he stood silhouetted against the yellow of the sunlit rock. He paused and faced the camp. For a moment he stood still. Then, raising his hand, he pointed up along the trail. Spontaneously a cheer rose from the army, and as if in answer he dropped his hand and resumed the ascent, drawing closer and closer to the top, until he reached the edge, and disappeared from sight.

At the foot of the cliff his attendant sat his horse, waiting. Unable to see what was going on above him, he strained his ears to hear. Only the vaguest of vague sounds drifted down to him—

sounds that meant nothing—but still he listened. From the camp nothing could be seen. The throng that had lined the cliff had melted away, as if drawn from its edge by interest in the visitor. For half an hour no sign of any activity upon the mesa could be detected. Then the attendant below, gazing up across the face of the great rock saw something floating slowly downward. For a moment he thought it to be a bird, but a careless breeze blew it lightly toward him, and dropped it on the rocks beside his horse's feet. Hurriedly he dismounted and seized it. It was half of a plume from Alvarado's helmet, severed as if by an arrow. For a moment he hesitated, unable to decide whether to dash up the dizzy cliff to the assistance of his master or to carry the news back to the camp, but before he could decide, he heard a cry—thin and clear from the height above—and the body of a native plunged through the air and was crushed upon the rocks near where he stood. A deeper cry followed—taking shape in words he vaguely recognized as Alvarado's battle cry.

No longer did he tarry. For the time Alvarado with his mighty sword was good against ten thousand savages. He must inform the captain-general. He leaped upon his horse's back, and, leaving Alvarado's mount to follow as it would, he dashed at breakneck speed down the rock strewn slope, turning, twisting, leaping gulleys, but never reining in until he drew up before the group of armoured

officers that had ridden out from camp to meet him as he came.

"He has been attacked!" cried the messenger, "And even now is fighting for his life against the savages."

Francisco spurred his horse forward, and turning in his saddle shouted out his orders.

"Samaniego!" he called. "Back to the camp, and bring forward the army. Señors, follow me! To the rescue! Alvarado!"

The group of mounted officers dug their spurs into their horses' flanks, and dashed recklessly after their captain-general. Across the uneven ground they raced. A horse stumbled and fell, throwing its armoured rider clattering upon the rocks. Francisco's mount, well in the lead, slipped on a rock, and went down on its knees, but, recovering, sped on. Up the slope they rode, dashing here and there amid the boulders and the cactus, until at last they reached the foot of the path. They threw themselves from their horses and drawing their swords, began the ascent.

Francisco led, well in advance of the others. Juan de Sotomayor followed, his sword drawn, his jaw set. Carlos came close upon his heels, and but a little way behind followed the others, Fray Juan conspicuous among them, with his drab gown, his dull steel corslet, his casque and crucifix. Up the slope they laboured, and as they neared the top they heard the great voice of Alvarado as he boomed his

battle cry. They cheered him as they came, and answered with his name. "Alvarado! Alvarado!"

The army was scattered across the plain below, the mounted men in advance, the musketeers and crossbowmen following, the Indian warriors scattered here and there in disarray, intent only on their destination. Slowly and more slowly the armoured group climbed the narrow trail. Above them savage heads peered over the precipice. A shower of arrows glanced harmless from their armour. A great stone dropped from above, striking the path and bounding into the air to fall through sickening space upon the slope below. Another and another followed, and then one hurtled from the edge above, whistling as it fell. It struck a jagged tooth that jutted from the face of the cliff, and changing its course swept swiftly along the path. It grazed Francisco as it passed, and all but threw him from the trail. With an effort he recovered himself, and turning saw the speeding stone bound twice along the path, and sweep De Sotomayor with it as it cleared the ledge and disappeared below the path.

Not heeding the rain of stones and arrows the little party climbed up and ever up, until at last they reached the top. Too breathless to give their battle cry, they rushed upon the circle of natives that surrounded Alvarado. Hacking, hewing, they cut their way through the yielding savages. Already amazed at the prowess of the one man who had first faced them, they fled precipitately at the

approach of the rescuers, and disappeared like rabbits into the buildings of the town, leaving the narrow field to Alvarado, his rescuers, and the dead.

But before the savages had scattered—even before the crest of the precipice had been reached, Francisco had felt vague forebodings of disappointment. That narrow path leading up the mesa was far too meagre and badly kept to be the highway leading to a wealthy city. For most of its tortuous length it was merely an ill prepared trail, that followed in crooked lines the cracks and crannies of the rock. Only here and there had it been built by men, and where the signs of their handiwork had appeared nothing but the simplest of crude efforts had resulted. And even as he reached the crest and dashed forward sword in hand against the yelling natives, Francisco had time to see from the corner of his eye the crude mud and stone dwellings, the rough ladders that led to their roofs, the absence of any sign of civilization save the lowest. And when at last the field was clear, and the little group of officers had drawn together, disappointment was written plainly on every countenance.

"A town of mud and sticks!" muttered Carlos.
"This cannot be Cibola."

"I fear that it is Cibola, Carlos," replied Francisco. "You must remember that the old man who told us of it lived all his long life in a hut far worse even than are these. And more—a hundred years have come and gone since he was here. It may

well be that every word he spoke was sober truth, and only our own minds, comparing what he told us of with what we knew and not with what he himself had seen, so warped the story as to make this pile of mud into the sparkling city we started out to find."

The first of the soldiers that had followed them across the plain below were climbing to the mesa's top and for an hour the long line of Spaniards and native warriors filed slowly up the path, gathering on the mesa. They looked about and beheld the mud walls of the little village—a village that could at the most house a thousand natives. They saw the squalor, the crudeness of the place. No temples, no buildings handsomer than the one that stood closest to them, that rose perhaps for thirty feet in four irregular steps. The others all were smaller, and the only signs of the wealth of the inhabitants that could be seen were two great earthen pots that had been left in the shade beside the nearest hut, daubed with bright colours, and filled with water.

Weary Spaniards and natives were still ascending the path, when the disappointment written large on every face found words with which to express itself.

"Where is their gold?" queried one man-at-arms of his companion.

"Aye, where?" grimly replied the other.

"And where do they keep their jewels?" asked

a third. "They must have jewels, for I myself have talked with those who have seen the ones that Don Francisco has. Those came from here. They must have others."

"Then let us look for them," cried a newcomer.

"Search the town—seize their jewels," rose the cry. "Take their gold."

Pandemonium broke loose. Everywhere the cry was taken up, and scattering about the village the money-mad Spaniards, followed by the wild horde of native warriors from the south, dashed yelling into the low-ceiled huts, with swords swinging and muskets firing, with crossbows twanging and with one thought only in their minds. Gold! Gold! Gold!

In vain did Francisco try to stop the orgy. Aided only by Fray Juan, Carlos, Alvarado, and a half dozen other officers, he dashed here and there, but only in his presence did the slaughter cease, while all through the dark rooms of the defenseless town the bloody search continued.

It was not until the sun had passed the zenith that the madness ended, and then one by one the unsuccessful men-at-arms and Indians, and the officers who had lost their heads in the murderous hunt, ceased their hunting and crept shamefacedly back to the little field at the head of the path. The city of their dreams had been found and captured, entered and sacked, and not an ounce of gold or a single gem had it yielded up to its captors.

Slowly the sun sank toward the west. Lower and lower it dropped, and the valley below grew vague and indistinct in the waning light. By ones and groups the sickened and disgusted army moved slowly down the path, and as Francisco stood at the edge of the cliff, his little group of faithful officers about him, the western sky slowly changed to red. The clouds were shot with fiery rays, and piled above the horizon they seemed a veritable sea of blood.

“A fitting sunset,” muttered Fray Juan, “for a day so hideous,” and the little group moved down the path, disappearing in the shadows as the sun sank slowly below the mountain tops.

CHAPTER XVII

DISILLUSIONED and disheartened the army lost its spirit, grumbled complainingly, and fell into a state of discord and discontent. The camp beside the stream became a point from which the soldiers wandered about at will, almost heedless of their officers' authority. Even among the officers there was discord. Those who on the day of the massacre had proved faithful to their trust and had aided Francisco in his attempts to stop the bloodshed were naturally incensed at what they properly looked upon as a serious breach of discipline on the part of those others who had allowed their greed to overcome their respect for authority.

For ten days conditions went from bad to worse, despite the efforts of Francisco and his little group of faithful officers to improve matters. The camp was insubordinate. There were no guards; the men had refused some time before to limit themselves to the confines that had originally been set for protection, and following the example of the Spaniards, the natives, who made up the larger part of the expedition, came and went as they would, built themselves huts along the stream, sometimes at considerable distances from the original camp.

When they were told by Carlos and Alvarado that an attack by the natives of the district would find them in no position to defend themselves, they laughed and shrugged their shoulders, as did the Spanish men-at-arms. Had not the whole village of the natives been taken with the loss of but one Spaniard? And had not those whom the village held been made an end of, all save a few who had disappeared in the night and had not returned? There was no danger from natives.

The new moon had come and, growing, had almost reached the full. Two weeks had passed since the village on the mesa had been sacked. Discontent still prevailed in the ranks of the expedition, and heeding only their own comfort and desires, the men seemed to have forgotten the oath they had taken before they had departed from Compostela.

"I had not thought to fail in such a way as this," remarked Francisco one evening as he sat beside his fire with Fray Juan, Carlos, Alvarado, and Samaniego. "I had plans that would offset many, many dangers, but not this one. I thought only of dangers from outside—of battles and hunger, of thirst and cold and heat. But not once did I give a moment's thought to the one thing that now seems the most difficult to overcome.

"We have tried for days to reconstruct this expedition into the force it was when we arrived at this spot, but without success. I quite appreciate

the disappointment that all of us have suffered in failing to find the city of our dreams. I, probably more than most, had much to gain by finding such a city as we thought was here. But we have found, instead, a village of ignorant savages, uncivilized, and apparently unacquainted with the gold and jewels we hoped to find. And in our disappointment we have slain hundreds of these natives whose only crime was that they wished to defend their homes, in which they had no single thing that we could deprive them of to our own profit.

"And now, having come this far, and having failed to find that for which we sought, we have added to the crime that we committed by acting the part of children, who, balked in their desires, refuse to play, and sulk instead.

"I had hoped that this mood would change, and that of their own accord the men of this expedition would realize after all that they are men. But they have not, and I am tired of waiting. At dawn I want those of you who will aid me to don your armour, and follow me. I intend to approach each man in this whole army, and order him to do his work as a soldier should. And should there be any who refuse, then they shall take up their arms and fight, for only over my dead body may they continue in the course that they have chosen!"

Silence fell upon the group about the fire, and across the stillness floated the mournful call of a screech owl, echoed by another far down the stream.

The fire flared and cast the shapeless shadows of the group about it in a strange design behind their backs. The blaze died down, and as someone threw another log upon the embers the distant screech owl called again—closer this time, and more clear.

From the bushes by the stream near at hand Pedro appeared, a puzzled look upon his face as he approached the lighted circle by the fire. He paused beside Francisco.

“Your Excellency,” he said.

Francisco glanced up.

“We have no sentries posted,” continued the man, “and so I have been watching along the stream.”

“And have you anything to report?” questioned Francisco.

“I am not sure,” replied Pedro. “But the horses seem strangely nervous, and it seemed to me that I saw several things move across the patches of moonlight, but I could not be sure, for when I went to see what it had been that moved I could find nothing, and yet I am sure that something moved.”

Alvarado laughed.

“Methinks the moon has addled your pate,” he remarked, and even as he spoke the screech owl called again, and repeated his call, from what seemed to be the centre of the camp.

Instantly the quiet of the night was broken by a thousand piercing yells. From everywhere they came, and as suddenly as they broke the stillness,

the sleeping camp became a maelstrom of seething activity. From everywhere—from nowhere—a thousand lithe figures had appeared, and without a moment's warning, had fallen upon the careless Spaniards and their equally careless Indian allies. The yells of the assailants were increased by the cries of the attacked. Awakened to find the dancing devils on every hand, the sleep befogged defenders were dashed to death by dozens and by scores ere they could realize their plight, their heads crushed by blows of stone war clubs, their throats cut by vicious knives of flint.

The group about the fire had leaped to their feet at the first cries, and, without pausing to buckle on their armour, had seized their swords. Shouting their battle cries they made toward the centre of the onslaught. But as they came, the foe melted away before them. Light of foot and wary of these powerful fighters, the natives disappeared as they advanced, and ever melting from before them closed again behind—their attack without a centre, their efforts everywhere only against those who, in their rude awakening, were left defenseless. Wherever a Spaniard wielded a sword he found the leaping fiends beyond its point. Wherever helpless wretches groped dazedly about for weapons, the blood bespattered war clubs added to their toll.

As Francisco and his little group advanced across the scattered camp they were joined by others until a band of three score or more had been collected.

Here and there a native had been struck down, but before the Spaniards had formed an active centre of resistance the yelling savages had melted away, leaving behind them less than a score of their own dead to pay for the dreadful toll that they had taken of the Spaniards and their allies. Like spectres they had come, and now like spectres they had gone again—had melted away in the moonlight and the shadows, but unlike spectres they had left behind them a bloody battlefield whereon there lay the stiffening forms of half a thousand men, among which wandered the youthful captain-general, sick of heart and filled with self-reproach.

The remnants of the expedition were gathered together, all willing now to obey the orders of their officers. Sentries obediently patrolled the camp, and where, an hour before, there had been a total lack of respect for authority, there was now a nervous readiness to obey every command. Slowly the night wore on, and as the moon passed slowly overhead the sentries heard the sound of coyotes as they sneaked among the dead. And Francisco, as he wandered aimlessly along the blood stained banks, recognized here and there the staring upturned faces of the corpses. He saw the body of Don Lope de Urrea, painfully contorted in the moonlight. A little way beyond lay Francisco Gorbalan beside Diego Lopez. And everywhere his aimless wanderings took him he saw those whom he had known, silent and cold in death.

He had wandered far beyond the sentry lines, alone with his thoughts, his mind a torment, his soul on fire, not realizing the dangers that lay about him, or the awfulness of his surroundings—intent only on the horrible disaster that had come and gone so quickly. Far down the stream he walked, until the sounds of the camp were faint in the distance, and paused at last beside a boulder that threw its shadow darkly across his path. He stopped, not knowing why, his eyes unseeing, his mind so torn with anguish that he could not think, and then he saw a movement as of another shadow within the shadow of the rock. It hardly attracted his attention, so distraught was he, until he heard a moan. He clenched his hands and cleared his brain, and stepped quickly forward. There lay a native, wounded by a sword thrust through both thighs, weak from the loss of blood, and all but dead.

Quickly Francisco stooped over him, and tearing his cape into strips he bound up the gaping wounds. Having staunched the flow of blood he hurried to the stream, and filled his hat with water. The Indian was almost unconscious, but feeling the cool water on his lips he revived and drank. And having drunk he looked up at his benefactor. For a moment his dizzy brain could not grasp the situation, but slowly he realized that aiding him was a member of the hated army that had sacked his village. Quickly he drew away, his face twisted, and a snarl upon his lips.

"I understand," said Francisco, sadly, heedless of the fact that the Indian could not understand his words. "I do not blame you. We came to take your gold and jewels, and finding that you had none, we slew you. But we shall slay no more, if I can help it. Come, let me lift you to your feet, and take you back to camp. You will be better there."

His voice soothed the weakened Indian, who did not draw away again. Francisco raised him to his feet, and slowly, haltingly, the two made their way back to the camp, where the sentry stared in amazement at his captain-general as he half carried the wounded Indian past the guard lines to his own tent.

* * * * *

"But why," asked Carlos the next evening as they sat around the camp fire, "did you bring the man to camp?"

Francisco did not answer for a moment, and the group of officers leaned forward, their eyes upon him, waiting for him to reply. He broke the twig that he was holding in his hands, and threw the pieces into the fire, where he watched them as the blaze caught them, and twisted them and turned them into ashes.

"We have been guilty," he replied at last, "of a crime against these people. And we have suffered a terrible punishment at their hands. I do not feel bitter at them for having turned the tables on us.

I feel bitter only at ourselves—particularly at my own self—for having ravished their pitiful village.

"And now we are going to make an effort to be their friends. There must be more of these people than those who lived upon the mountain there, for many more than that attacked us. And this man I brought into our camp must be kept until he is well, and perhaps he will aid us in overcoming the hatred that these people have for us. It will take time, I know, but once we have become their friends we shall be able to leave without so great a stain upon our honour as now rests there, and I shall be a little more content."

Silence fell upon the group again. The blaze died down, and the coals glowed red in the darkness. Far down the stream a coyote howled as it paused to dig at a shallow grave. A horse stamped his foot heavily in the darkness by a tree. A sentry's armour rattled as he walked his post.

"My son," said Fray Juan from the farther side of the circle. "It warms my heart to hear you speak, for no more manly words were ever spoken. The fault is ours, and the atonement too must be. It benefits us not if we should gain the world, if in the gaining we should lose our honour and our souls."

* * * * *

In the weeks that followed, the wounded Indian became the ward of the whole camp. The men-at-

arms promptly dubbed him "Turk" because of his fancied resemblance to the subjects of the Sultan, and "Turk" he remained, through all the months he was with the army. His wounds healed, and he rapidly picked up enough Spanish to be able to converse with the officers and men, who whiled away their time teaching him.

It was six weeks before his wounds were completely well, but at the end of that time he had entirely recovered, and had, as well, learned enough Spanish to be able to converse haltingly, and to tell the Spaniards much of the surrounding country that they had not learned for themselves.

He told them that the village they had sacked was called by the Indians, Kech-i-pau-an, and that Cibola contained six other villages, similar to Kechipauan. It was from these other villages that the army had come that had fallen on the Spaniards in the night. Urged by the refugees that had been driven from Kechipauan by the Spaniards, the other villages had called a council of war, and had planned the attack in all its details.

But of gold and precious stones he knew nothing—or at most but very little. He told them a story that was told him by his mother when he was but a child—a story that had been told her by her mother, who as a little girl had heard it from the story tellers of the village. It was of a warrior from some land far to the south, who with others of his tribe had been captured in battle. And of

those captured he alone had escaped, and so mighty had he been that he forced his way through the guards who stood at the head of the trail leading from the mesa, and with him he would have taken the daughter of the chief. But she was seized and held by the guards, while he had fled, taking with him a pouch of wonderful stones, that had been collected by the people of the village for ten score years or more. And in that pouch had been all the stones the village owned. And after the warrior had fled, taking with him the pouch of stones, the maid had thrown herself from the edge of the great cliff for love of him. No other similar stones had ever been seen in Cibola since, for never after that had the tribe visited the lands in which these stones were found—a land that lay far distant, and was called Quivera, and to which no one now living had ever traveled.

Immediately he had told his story all was excitement again within the camp. For weeks the Spaniards had grown accustomed to the thought that they had come to a land of no promise—a land that contained nothing but deserts and mountains and ferocious natives—a land that had no jewels, no gold to offer. And now once more they were told of a new land, from which had come the wonderful opals that their captain-general had gotten from the ancient Indian at Compostela.

They plied the Turk with questions, and wildly exaggerated his halting replies. Was gold too to

be found in the land of Quivera? "What," the Turk asked, "is gold?" Gold! Gold! Did he not know gold? Gold is the yellow metal of which their rings are made, with which the armour of the captain-general is decorated. Is there such a metal in this wonderful land of Quivera?

"I have not been to this far land," replied the Turk, in halting Spanish, "but I have been told by the story tellers of my village that the bowls and plates from which the people of Quivera eat their food are made of a metal that glistens and shines."

"Gold! Gold! Gold!" shouted the delighted Spaniards. "Quivera is the land of gold! And with the gold are jewels! Let us march to Quivera!"

But Francisco refused to be too much encouraged by the news, and merely set himself the task of pacifying the villages in the vicinity—a task that busied the dwindled army for weeks that grew slowly into months. And with the passing of the months came cooler weather, that presaged the coming of winter. So plans were made to camp in the valley until spring, and then to set out on the path to the east and north, where the wonderful land of Quivera was said to lie.

CHAPTER XVIII

TRUE to his word Francisco refused to leave Cibola until the villages had been pacified, but before the Spaniards had gained a friendly entrance to the native towns, summer had merged into autumn, autumn into winter, and winter was about to give way to the advances of another spring. But finally peace was made with the last of the villages, and a long and tiresome ceremonial was gone through with in the medicine lodge at Kechipauan that signified the acceptance by the natives of His Catholic Majesty King Charles as their supreme ruler.

The Turk had been with the Spaniards ever since the massacre, and had made himself a messenger to the natives. All during the eight months of the army's stay he had gone between the camp and the villages, returning with reports of the progress of his effort to convince his tribesmen of the sincerity of the Spaniards, and in the end he came with the news that he had won for Francisco what the captain-general had sworn he would obtain—the friendship of the natives of the "Seven Cities of Cibola."

But until the final ceremonial had ended, Francisco had refused to consider a movement toward

that newer land that the Turk had told them of—Quivera, where gold and jewels were plentiful, and riches could be had for the asking. But, despite their captain-general's failure to inquire more of this land, the soldiers had gathered together the stories concerning it. In the months that passed, the natives picked up a little Spanish, and the Spaniards a little of the native tongue, and at every opportunity the conversations turned to the vague and distant land in which jewels abounded, and where the very pots and pans were gold.

But no definite information did they get. It had been generations since a member of the tribe had visited Quivera, and there remained nothing save stories to tell of the strange land. It was distant, but how distant no one knew. So far away it lay that one story said that to reach it would require a journey of ten score days or more. But this the Spaniards could not believe, for ten score days would take them back to Spain, and as the natives said that Quivera lay to the east and somewhat to the north, the white men merely laughed, and laughing said that ten score days of travel in that direction would take them all the way to England, and in England they well knew that pots and pans were made of trusty iron, and the jewels there were mostly in the crown worn by the King. So the distance to Quivera must be much less, and as the Spaniards laughed, the natives, remembering the vague stories as they were handed

down from father to son and son to grandson, admitted that they did not know, and that perhaps it was not so far—perhaps only half of what had at first been reported, or half of half. And so the story went the rounds that the journey could be made in two months or less, and when at last Francisco came to question the story tellers who remembered what they as children had been told, he was told that Quivera lay to the east but three score days' journey, across a level land wherein there were no mountains, no deserts—no terrible heat, no thirst. And learning what he could, he made his plans.

So it was that when the mild winter had begun to show the first signs of coming spring, the army marched once more into the unknown to search for gold and jewels that seemed to lie but a little way beyond.

* * * * *

The natives from the south had been but a burden to the Spaniards, and as the cattle and sheep were gone—eaten, every one, during the thirteen months since the army had left Compostela—there was little for them to do. The long campaign had hardened the Spaniards, had simplified their needs, and had made them entirely self-supporting, while the Indians who had accompanied the army had become ever more and more dependent upon the Spaniards until at last they were a burden, not a help.

The year that had passed since Culiacan was left behind had taken a terrible toll of both Indians and Spaniards. Three hundred white men and a thousand natives had marched proudly away in the search for gold, and now but half the Spaniards and less than half the natives still remained. First the desert had taken its toll, and then the terrible night attack had accounted for nearly six hundred, six score of whom had been Spaniards. And in the seven months that had passed since then, sickness and accidents had carried off still more, until there remained but half of the original three hundred Spaniards, and less than four hundred of the thousand natives that had accompanied them.

The natives of Cibola offered guides who knew the country part way, whereas the Indians from the south knew it not at all, and so it was decided to leave the four hundred to await the return of the Spaniards, who, guided by their new-found allies, would make a rapid journey, and return to Kechipauan before the coming of another winter.

The preparations for the journey were of the simplest. With the one hundred and fifty Spaniards there were to go a score of natives, who would act as guides, and the horses that remained were to be the only supply train. With the exception of thirty, which were to carry the heavily armoured cavaliers, all of the horses were piled high with the goods of the little army, and without further

preparations the journey across the trackless country began.

Slowly they progressed, the native guides all but useless by the time Cibola was ten days behind. Stops were made here and there to enable scouting parties to search to north and east and south for the route they wished to follow. But across the great stretches there lay no path, no sign of travel—nothing save space, vast and limitless space—and as they moved on again the country that they found was ever as devoid of life. Only rabbits and prairie dogs lived on all this wide and treeless plain, and endless great herds of buffalo, that roamed by millions. So vast a herd was encountered that for fifty miles the army moved through its scattered leaders before at last the cows and calves were seen. The Spaniards marveled at these great "hump-backed cattle" and no longer did they miss the food that had been furnished by the cattle and the sheep that they had brought from Compostela to Cibola.

Slowly the army pressed onward, crossing streams, stopping to explore, and not realizing the vast spaces that lay before them, wandering ever on and on, convinced that the land for which they were searching could not be far—not knowing the vastness of the continent in which they traveled. April passed, and May, and summer followed spring, but still the band marched slowly forward, or stopped to camp beside some little stream to wait until the

scouting parties could return with news as to what lay about them. Sometimes for weeks they waited, while little groups of horsemen traveled in all directions, hoping to find some break in the monotony of the plains. But always when they returned the report was the same, and the little army packed up its supplies and pushed farther into the limitless space to the east and north.

Summer passed, and autumn came, a cool delightful autumn after the heat of the summer on the treeless plain, and the army found itself in a country where the river flowed to the east instead of to the southeast. The discovery put new life into the men, and renewed their energy. The weather became more cool, until the frost was on the prairie grass each morning, and the breath of the horses showed white in the cold of the moonlit nights. But on the army marched, and on, until September and October had passed, and November come.

"How much farther can Quivera be from where we now are?" asked Francisco of the Turk.

"We have come far," replied the Indian, "but we have traveled very slowly. So it is that we have been so long upon the way. For many weeks we have camped and waited while parties wandered away on long journeys to look for what we wish to find. Had we but traveled on, instead of waiting, we would long since have come to where Quivera lies. And even now, if we should move more rapidly we shall be there ere the winter comes."

Francisco pondered. Too far were they from Cibola to hope to return before the winter snows set in, and where they were was not a fit place for a winter camp. Therefore, but one thing remained for them to do. They must press on, and, finding Quivera, spend the winter there, returning in the spring.

And so the little band of Spaniards marched on, not knowing that Quivera was but a vague and unplaced country in which there was no gold—not knowing that the metal of which they had been told by the natives of Cibola was but copper, dug by savages from the rich deposits that lay along an undiscovered lake—an inland sea that remained unknown and unnamed another hundred years—and then was called Superior.

And as the Spaniards marched across the treeless plains the winter came. A gust of frigid wind came out of a darkening sky, and before camp could be made the snow began to fall. Whistling across the freezing ground the snowflakes bit like driving sand. The little protection that the bank of a stream afforded was all the shivering Spaniards had to aid them in their fight against the cold. Half the tents were torn to shreds in the biting blast—others fluttered and shook, bellied and blew down, forcing the soldiers to the arduous necessity of erecting them in the bitter cold. The horses, left to shift for themselves, drifted off with the wind, cut by the frozen particles, their manes and tails filled with

snow and sleet. Some of the wood that grew along the banks of the stream was gathered, and tiny blazes were lighted in the tents, where the choking clouds of smoke forced the inmates to alternate between the limited warmth of the fire and the cold of the whistling blizzard. Each tent became an independent unit, unable to assist or to be helped by any other. Wherever the bank of the stream offered protection, there a tent was erected, the men toiling unselfishly in the wind and cold. The frozen ground was cut away, and in the days that followed the first breaking of the storm a dozen stifling dugouts had been built, wherein were crowded what remained of the exploring band, while here and there outside were little drifts that marked the spots where those who had succumbed were lying on the frozen ground beneath the driving snow.

Finally the blizzard passed, leaving the stream locked beneath a foot of ice, the landscape shrouded in snow that had drifted high over the dugouts along the bank. But winter had settled down, and never for a moment did it relax. The dry snow squeaked beneath the heels of the men as they walked along the paths that they had made about the camp. The holes they chopped through the ice when they went to draw water from the stream, froze quickly. The ground beneath the snow seemed hard as flint, and shallow were the graves that were dug for those who died. Save for eight or ten, the horses had drifted off with the blizzard, never

to return, and seeing that the food supply was limited Francisco ordered that the horses which remained be killed to replenish the small store.

The weather settled down, still and cold, the snow piled in great drifts about the entrances to the dugouts, at which the torn canvas of the tents served as curtains to keep out the cold. Only the necessity of securing fuel and water forced the men out into the open where the air was keen and the temperature bitter. Gradually the dugouts became more liveable—rude fireplaces were built that rid their quarters of the smoke, and life became a long vigil, in which the men lay about the fires in the low, crowded dugouts, not venturing forth except to bring in fuel and water.

Disagreeable and disheartening as the life was, the men grew somewhat accustomed to it in the following weeks, and settled down to wait through the winter until spring should release them from the necessity of remaining in their enforced camp. The supplies on hand were divided, and it was found that by careful use there would be enough to last throughout the winter unless it proved far longer than was probable. Francisco announced that the return journey to Cibola and Mexico City would be begun as soon as the weather permitted, and the men, deciding that there was little to do save to live as comfortably as possible, began to while away the long, cold winter.

CHAPTER XIX

OUR misfortunes have seemed endless," said Francisco to the others who were gathered one evening about the fire in the dugout three or four weeks after the blizzard. "From the moment that the village on the mountain was taken we have suffered difficulties, and now we face the end of our attempt. Even when spring releases us from the grip of winter we must return. With our horses gone, with our army shrunken until we number now but ninety-two, and with supplies enough to last until the spring only if we use the greatest care, we can look forward to nothing save a quick journey back across the plains that we have crossed, living on the game we can secure upon the way.

"But now our greatest duty is to keep up the spirits of our men. Fifty-eight lie buried here beneath this snow—frozen ere we could build ourselves a camp where they could be sheltered from the cold, and it behooves us who are responsible for the welfare of the others, to see that no other misfortune befall.

"There are now in these burrows we have builded, ninety-two Spaniards and twelve natives. With

that handful, even though we were well supplied with horses and food, it is hardly likely that we could overcome such a country as this Quivera is said to be. If, in the spring, we can learn more of it—if we have approached near unto its borders, it may be that we can learn something that will tell us in what strength we must come in order to accomplish our purpose. If not, we must return, a tattered remnant of the proud and powerful army that left Compostela.

"But fortunately we have left the natives of Cibola pacified and friendly. We can return to their country when the spring breaks, and from there we can return once more to Mexico. Then, if it seems to be worth while, another expedition can be organized to push its way into this vast country, with, perhaps, more good fortune than has been ours."

As he was speaking the canvas that hung over the entrance to the dugout was pushed aside and Pedro entered. He was breathing rapidly as if he had been running, and the expression on his tanned features betrayed the fact that he had news of great importance. Francisco glanced up, and having finished his sentence he sat waiting for Pedro to speak.

"Your Excellency," he said, breathlessly, "I have overheard the Turk and his companions as they planned to desert the camp."

"Desert the camp?" echoed Francisco. "If they

desert the camp where will they go? To live on some warm snowdrift?"

"Nay, Your Excellency," returned Pedro. "They mean to desert the camp, and to take with them as much of the food as they can steal. With that piled upon the sleds that we have builded to haul our firewood on, they mean to begin the journey back to Cibola, leaving us to starve."

"You are mad," growled Alvarado. "The Turk is no fool. He would not dare risk the journey back to Cibola across the snow. They would freeze before they had passed from sight of the camp."

"Nay, Your Excellency," insisted Pedro, still addressing Francisco. "They have planned to take with them a tent, and although I cannot speak their tongue well, I understand it well enough to know from what they said that their plans are serious and well laid."

"Where have you heard all this?" asked Fray Juan.

"From the entrance to their dugout," returned Pedro. "As Your Excellencies know, the natives have a small dugout near the last one down the stream. I went down to see my friend Antonio, who lives in the last dugout, and as I approached the entrance I heard the natives talking in their quarters. One of them spoke loudly in his own tongue which I understand slightly. 'To-morrow we leave,' he said, 'and the white men stay behind to die and find their graves beneath the snow!'

"And having overheard that I crept close to the strip of cloth that serves them for a door, and tried to hear their plans. But part of the time they spoke in tones so low that I could not hear. And some of the words of their tongue I could not understand. But I do know that they now plan to set out early on the morrow, before the camp is yet awake. And that to-night they plan to take the food from each of the other dugouts, that they may live while all of us may starve."

"The man is wandering," growled Alvarado. "He thinks he knows what these wild men say in their crazy tongue, when they themselves do not. There is no meaning in the foolish sounds they make—no more meaning than in the grunts of pigs. The man is wandering."

"Nay, Alvarado," remarked Carlos. "If I remember rightly, you said that Pedro was moonstruck when he brought us word that he saw shadows moving about the camp just before these same pigs of natives attacked us after we had taken Kechipauan. And yet we now know that something had probably been seen to move just as he said. So I am inclined to believe him—at least to such an extent as will necessitate a visit to the dugout in which these wild men live. If they mean no harm our visit will bring them none. But if they plan to leave us, and take with them our food, then it were well that we forestall them."

"Aye," agreed Francisco. "It will do no harm

to see. And I have confidence in Pedro. Señors, bring with you your swords, and let us see what all this means."

Alvarado leaped to his feet.

"Nay, Your Excellency," he cried. "It is not necessary that we all brave the cold. With Pedro to lead me, I will bring these carrion here to you. It is not meet that you should visit them. I did not mean to question Pedro, who knows that my words are rougher than my thoughts. But await us here, and we will bring the wild men, bound and meek as lambs. Come, Pedro."

He threw his cape about him, picked up his great sword, and followed by Pedro, went out into the night. But little time elapsed before Pedro pushed aside the canvas at the entrance again, and entered, leading twelve natives by a knotted cord that was bound tightly about their wrists. Slowly the line of Indians filed in, their faces showing neither disappointment, nor anger, nor fear—their lips pressed together, their black eyes shining in the light of the fire, and behind them came Alvarado, his sword drawn, and his great voice bellowing.

"Move more quickly," he shouted, as he pricked the last of the line with the point of his sword. "More quickly, and be thankful that I have not shorn your heads from your shoulders with my bodkin."

He followed the last of the natives through the doorway, into the crowded room.

"Here they are, Your Excellency," he continued, waving carelessly with his sword toward the line of Indians as they stood crowded together against the wall. "They made many noises when Pedro and I visited them in their reception hall, but although Pedro pretends to think that all their noises have meanings, I am inclined to think that there is nothing to it, for Pedro says that they said they would not come and yet they all are here."

The gathering in the little dugout fell silent, waiting for Francisco to speak, and Francisco, reading in the glance of the Turk the proof of Pedro's tale, frowned.

"I am anxious," he said at last to the group of natives before him, "that I reserve my judgment of you until I have heard your story. But I warn you, tell me no lies. For already I know that you planned to leave—that you planned to take from us the most of our slender store of food—that you planned to leave us here to starve or die of cold. Already I know that you were all but ready to begin your flight.

"From what I know it would seem that you were about to play us false—to leave five score of men to perish while you were making an attempt to journey back to your own people, taking with you the food that rightfully belongs to all of us, and leaving ten men to starve for each of you who planned to make the journey. All of this I know.

"What I do not know is the reason for your

plans—why you wished to make this hazardous journey through the winter and the snow—why you proposed this rash attempt to cross five hundred leagues of frozen plain, when there was comparative comfort here, where you could share our camp and food.

“Upon your reason depends your punishment.”

He stopped, and every eye was upon the Turk. But silently the Indian stood, and gave no answer. For a minute no one spoke.

“Do you fear to tell?” asked Francisco.

The Indian drew himself up to his full height, and looked at the captain-general steadily.

“We do not fear,” he replied, proudly. “I shall tell our reasons.”

He paused, and glanced about the crowded place. In the dim light of the flickering fire his face appeared to be of bronze. His broad forehead, his high cheek bones, his aquiline nose, his firm jaw impressed the group of Spaniards, as he stood defiant—at bay. No tremor betrayed his knowledge that hardly a Spaniard in the camp would refrain from passing on him a judgment of death for his offense. No sign did he give that he feared it. And behind him against the wall the others of the tethered group stood like graven images, unmoved and apparently immovable.

Alvarado leaned against the wall beside the entrance, his hands resting upon the hilt of his great sword, his great form casting a shapeless shadow

that wavered back and forth across the smoke stained wall, his head stooped slightly lest it touch the sapling beams that curved beneath the weight of the earth upon the roof. The group about the fire had moved back, some sitting, some standing against the wall on both sides of the crude fireplace. Fray Juan, his lean face serious and furrowed, stood with folded arms and slightly bowed head beside Carlos, whose brow was deeply creased as he stood rubbing his chin with his calloused hand, looking past Francisco's shoulder at the defiant Indian.

Francisco glanced at Pedro as he stood still holding the end of the rope with which the natives had been led, and with a slight shake of his head signalled the man to release them. The Indian glanced down as the cord was loosened, and raised his eyes courageously to Francisco's again before he spoke.

"I shall tell our reasons," he repeated.

"When you came upon Kechipauan from your distant land, you came looking for yellow metal and for sparkling stones. A great distance had you traveled, out of a land that we knew not of, and many hardships you passed through to come into our land. And so when you had come and had, with the aid of the clothes of steel in which you dress, forced your way into our village, which was never before taken by an enemy, you were disappointed that we had no gold or sparkling stones that you could take. And in your disappointment you slew our men and women, and even our children,

allowing but a handful to escape. For no reason were they killed save that they had none of that for which you sought.

"I was one who was not slain. As I stood to defend my house from those who sought to enter it I was struck on the head from behind, and fell. And I lay as if dead from the stroke until evening. And when I again knew what was about me the village was silent, and all your army gone. But there within my house I found the woman I had taken to be my wife, and she was dead. And clasped in her arms was my son, and he was dead. And searching in the ruins I found my father and my mother—dead. And many of my tribe—all dead.

"And there, with the rising moon throwing shadows upon the dead who had been my family and my tribesmen I vowed revenge!

"I crept away from the village, and journeyed to the other villages of Cibola, to which a few others who had escaped came also. And there I planned to take a thousand warriors, and to fall upon you in your camp, and to slay you there. Carefully the attack was planned, and when we fell upon you many were slain. But against you we could not fight when you had armed yourselves, and so we could not slay you all.

"And in the battle I was wounded, and on the field I would have died. But you, the captain-general aided me, not knowing that I had been the

captain-general of my warriors. And in your camp I saw that we could not hope to defeat you when you were prepared, and that a score of you, clad in steel, could stand against all the warriors of Cibola. And then it was that I planned to lead you away into this vast country, and to lure you on by tales of the yellow metal you wish to find.

"Carefully our trap was laid, and long did we strive to lead you here, until at last you were convinced, and came. And having led you to this country it was our plan to let you perish, even though those of us who came with you should also perish.

"But having led you here we saw that it might be that you would hold out through the winter, and when the spring again should come you would return to Cibola, there to find that the warriors of our tribe had slain the warriors from the south who came with you. And with your suits of steel it might be that even those of you who now are left could slay our warriors and lay waste our homes. And so we planned to leave ere to-morrow's sun, and to take with us what food we needed, and to cut holes through the ice for what was left.

"Thus would we return to our own land, or die of cold upon the way, leaving you to journey farther still into Quivera, to find the yellow metal that you love, or to die of cold and hunger in these holes in the frozen earth.

"We have failed, at least in part, but not yet

have you escaped the fate we planned, for should you live here until the spring and journey back again into Cibola, there you will find our warriors ready. It matters not how many you may slay, there will be others to attack, until the last of you shall sink beneath their blows and die, and the wolves and vultures of our valley will feed upon your carcasses.

"You have our story. What our own fate may be we do not care."

He finished speaking, and folded his arms beneath his blanket, standing with head erect, and black eyes flashing. There was no sound save the crackle of the fire, and every eye was upon Francisco, as he stood with bowed head and thoughtful face. He did not move as the Indian finished speaking, but stood silently, weighing his thoughts. For what seemed an age there was not a sound in the crowded room, and then Alvarado slowly lifted his sword, and felt of its edge with his thumb. He carefully examined its whole length, and finally reached its point. Apparently satisfied with its keenness he looked up.

"Have Pedro lead them out," he growled, looking at Francisco, "and I shall slay them now."

"Nay, Alvarado," replied Francisco, glancing up. "They shall not be slain. I do not blame them for their hatred of us, for we have cruelly wronged them. But I had thought that we had made them friends. Instead of that we have but walked into

a trap, and have sought a country that does not exist. They fed us lies and led us here to die."

"We told no lies," replied the Turk quickly. "We merely told the stories that our tribe has told for scores and scores of years. The stories say that somewhere in this great land there is Quivera, and in Quivera is the metal you desire. We know not where, and told you that we knew not. We did not tell you lies."

"You told us that you did not know," admitted Francisco, and turning to the others he continued, "but here we are. And being here it will serve no purpose to punish them with death. But neither can we have them here, for we are enemies."

A murmur of disapproval arose from the group, but he stopped it with a glance and turned to the Turk.

"With to-morrow's rising sun you will start your journey for Cibola. A fair share of our food you may have, but no more. It is what you would have done, save that we shall not starve when you have gone. I understand your reason for revenge, and am tempted not to force you upon your way. But in Cibola we left four hundred warriors, depending upon your word that they would be unmolested until we returned. Now, by treachery, they have been slain.

"You say you have not lied. Ever since I took you, wounded and half dead, into our camp you've lived a lie. Pretending to be our friend you have

led us into this frozen land, hoping to lead us to our deaths. Promising not to harm the warriors we left behind us in your valley, you planned to slay them, and by now their bones are scattered by the wolves.

"No death that you could suffer would atone for all your crimes, and yet I shall give you this chance for your lives, for ours was the first mistake—ours the first crime."

He paused for a moment.

"Pedro," he added, turning. "Lead them back to their quarters, and do you, Alvarado, and you, Carlos, see that they are given enough food for their journey. And see, too, that they have left by dawn."

The Indians filed out led by Pedro, and followed by the two officers, while Francisco turned and stood gazing into the fire. He did not move as Fray Juan lay a hairy hand upon his shoulder.

"My son," he said. "Gold we have not found, nor precious stones, and all our journey has been filled with disappointments. But despite these troubles I feel that you can still look forward hopefully, for no such spirit as is yours is doomed to failure."

CHAPTER XX

SLOWLY—very slowly, the days passed in the household of the Viceroy. The months dragged past in monotonous array. The seasons came and went, but no longer were Dolores and Isabella interested in their changes. Before the arrival of Francisco and Carlos, Mexico City had been a shifting kaleidoscope of romantic interest, in which great adventurers, nobles of high degree, cavaliers, and villains had intermingled in a fascinating life that shifted and changed—never twice the same, yet never for a moment losing its brilliancy. Now the weeks passed, months came and went, and to the two girls their round was one of drab and dreary monotony, their only thoughts upon their lovers, wandering in an unknown land, facing unknown dangers.

Gorgoza had returned to Mexico City, and in the absence of his rival, once more assumed his attitude of egotistical superiority. It was seldom that he met Dolores, but each time he did he commented on the possible duration of the expedition's journey, and finally, after a year or more had passed with no word from it, his comments gradually turned to the dangers they must have faced, to the horrible

possibilities of death, to the possible extermination of the entire army by the inhabitants of the land they had set out to conquer.

But Dolores raised her chin and looked at him with narrowed eyes each time he dared to speak, and even with his disregard for her feelings he failed to make much headway. His remarks were abruptly interrupted, or he was left to finish them to please merely his own ear, as Dolores, with head erect and eyes flashing, carefully lifted the hem of her skirt and walked majestically from his presence. If he essayed to follow, she went directly to her own apartments where Gorgoza dared not come.

On a morning late in April, two years after Francisco and Carlos had led their proud army from Compostela to the north, Dolores and Isabella were seated on the stone bench beneath the rose bush in the garden. The garden had changed but little. The rose bush, somewhat larger, still shielded the bench from the stretch of lawn behind it. The slender tips of the weeping willow still trailed the dark surface of the pool. The water lilies still dotted the placid surface and were reflected in its mirror, and the hilt of a rapier, its gold decorations tarnished, its steel rusted, still stood a little above the water at the edge of the pool, as it had stood since the summer day more than two years before, when it had been wrenched from Gorgoza's hand by the blade with which Francisco faced him,

and had flown whistling, to bury itself in the shallow water and the mud.

Dolores' eyes were resting on the tarnished, rusted rapier.

"Never shall I forget the day," she was saying to Isabella. "I have told you of it a thousand times, but you may hear me yet another thousand. The blade has all but fallen a dozen times. It sags slowly over, for the mud in which it stands hardly can support its weight. But each time that it seems about to disappear beneath the surface I pick it up, and stand it upright, that I may keep it there till my Francisco comes.

"And since that day Gorgoza has never once set foot within this garden. At least I have never seen him here. But in that, methinks, he shows taste that is rather better than that which he usually displays.

"But of late he grows ever more insistent. I dare not put in my appearance where he can see me, else he is at my side, with his evil smirk, making remarks that he thinks are compliments; about my eyes, my hair, my lips. And how I hate him for it. It matters not what I may say or do. He does naught but bow and smile and scrape, as if I were doing just what he would have me do, and nothing I can think of seems to hold him off the next time that we meet. And here in the garden is the only place, it seems, outside our own apartments, that I am safe from his intrusions.

"But why do I tell you all this. You know it all as well as I, and yet you sit and listen as I talk as if there were some interest in my words."

Isabella smiled gently, gazing without seeing at the reflections in the water.

"I only seem to listen," she replied sadly. "In reality I do not. I only think of Carlos. I have dreamed so often that he would be killed, and only last night I dreamed that dream again. I fear that I shall never see him more. Always have I felt that he would not return—that in that awful land that he has visited he would find his death."

"Isabella," cried Dolores, throwing her arms about her friend, "how you talk. You must not let yourself be frightened by a dream. Sometimes, 'tis true, they seem to be real warnings, but oftener still they are but nonsense. I have often dreamed of deaths. I even dreamed not long ago that Gorgoza, with his hateful face, was dead. And yet no longer ago than this very morning I saw him hale and hearty as he bawled his orders to his men outside the gate. I take no stock in dreams."

"Perhaps," replied Isabella. "Perhaps. But always I have feared for him."

She rose and stood looking absently at the grass, choking back a sob.

"I am going to the chapel," she added slowly, and crossing the path, she disappeared around a turn.

Dolores sat musing. Only the song of a bird

here and there broke the stillness of the garden. Overhead the leaves of the trees hung motionless in the quiet air. The surface of the pool was unbroken by even the faintest of ripples. The warm sunlight seemed to have stilled the world. She was lost in thought, her mind far, far away, but in the silence of the garden she heard a sound, as if a twig had snapped beneath a foot. Quickly she sat up, a frown of perplexity upon her clear brow. She glanced around, and beheld Gorgoza as he approached the bench.

She sprang to her feet, her frown of perplexity turned to one of anger. Gorgoza bowed.

"Buenas dias, señorita," he said. "I am more than fortunate to meet you so opportunely."

"I see nothing opportune in the meeting," replied Dolores. "To me it seems unfortunate."

"Ah, but you do not know, perhaps," he replied, "that I have something of importance to say."

"That would be strange," answered the girl, "and certainly it is not usual."

Gorgoza, for a moment, was nonplussed. But, determined to have his say, he continued.

"If you will give me but a moment of your time—" he began.

"I shall give you *but* a moment," she interrupted.

Again he faltered, but again he spoke.

"A year ago, or nearly that, I had the honour to ask your father for your hand—"

Dolores shrank back.

"—but at that time His Excellency informed me that he was not prepared to give his daughter in marriage. He did say, however, that he had no objection to my suit."

"It may be," retorted Dolores, "that he has not. But make no mistake—I have."

"I had hoped," continued Gorgoza, paying no attention to the interruption, "to gain your consent. It would be better so. But I have allowed a year to pass, in which you have failed to change your attitude toward me. This, then, is my final word to you before I again speak to His Excellency."

"Speak, if you wish, to His Excellency," replied Dolores. "But remember that rather than be your wife I would die a thousand times!" She drew from the folds of her skirt a tiny dagger, and held it firmly as she continued. "Since the day Don Francisco drove you to the water's edge, and tore from your grasp the blade with which you strove to kill him, I have carried this. And always will it be my companion, so long as I have you to fear, or until the man I love returns to take me as his wife!"

Gorgoza's face darkened. His heavy eyebrows knit themselves together, and his fists clenched in his anger.

"The man you love is dead," he growled, brutally, "else he would have returned ere now. For more than two years he has been gone, on a journey that should have been completed in six months, and still

there is no word of him. And it is I that you shall wed, for 'tis time you had a husband to curb your wicked temper, and already has His Excellency given me encouragement. I shall see him this very day, and perhaps his 'yes' will over-rule your 'nay'!"

He turned and strode off across the grass, while Dolores stood looking after him, her heart pounding, fearful lest her father should see fit to give her to the man she loathed, and yet determined that she would not marry him, even though, to avoid it, she should be forced to die by her own hand.

And yet, she thought, there must be something done, else Gorgoza, having approached the Viceroy, might secure his consent. Well she knew the arguments her father would use to convince her. "Gorgoza is the wealthiest man in all Mexico," he would say. "Wealthier by far than am I." And too, "Gorgoza is in charge of all my military household, my soldiers, my police—everything. He has been an able assistant, and has prevented uprisings and Indian revolutions. Surely he is fit to be the husband of my daughter."

Those were the arguments he would advance, and little would it matter in his mind that she loved him not—that she loathed him—that she loved another. The advantages that her marriage to the other would bring were all that would appeal to him. Money, position, influence. Those might sway her father. Love or lack of it would not.

She hardly paused, but went at once into the mansion, and passing through the anteroom, entered the Viceroy's apartments. He was seated at his desk, a pile of papers before him, and an air of listlessness about him, as if the work he had to do was thoroughly disagreeable. Dolores' sharp eyes saw in a moment that he would not object to an interruption.

"Do I intrude," she asked, "upon duties too important to permit your giving me a little of your time?"

He glanced up, his face serious.

"The work is important, it is true," he said, "but these warm days do seem to make it hard for me to keep from falling asleep over it. I welcome a change, and you come to see me here but seldom. I am glad you have come. What is it that you wish?"

She drew a chair up beside him, and sat down.

"I have but just learned," she began, "that Señor Gorgoza did me the honour to ask for my hand."

"He did," replied the Viceroy, "a year or more ago. But he has said nothing since. At that time I told him that I had not decided, thinking that he would speak again soon. But he has not, and I have given it but little thought. I should think more of my only daughter, but the affairs of government give me little time. I told him that I did not object to his suit, and as I think it over it seems to

me that he would make a very good husband for you. And 'tis time you had a husband.

"Yes, my daughter. If he should speak to me again, I shall consent."

Dolores sat silent for a moment, gazing at her hands as they lay in her lap.

"Why did you not tell me?" she asked finally.

The Viceroy hesitated.

"I do not know," he said at last. "I have many, many important matters to think of, and I did not think to, especially as nothing was decided."

"Has any one else ever asked for my hand?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied. "Don Francisco, ere he left for Compostela for the first time, asked. But he had nothing. He left Toledo because of debts. I could not have my daughter marry a pauper."

"But his family is an excellent one," she remarked.

"True," he replied, "but family is not everything. Of course he is a favourite of His Majesty. That is certainly in his favour, and, as you say, his family is of the best."

"But suppose he should return with wealth?" she asked, glancing up.

"Then he would be one that I might consider. But he has been gone for more than two years. I fear for him and for the expedition."

"It seems to me that, of the two, Don Francisco

is the better match, if he should return with the great wealth he went to seek," Dolores insisted.

"Yes," he agreed. "That is true. Perhaps it would be better to wait. You are still young enough. Perhaps there is no hurry. But if Gorgoza should speak, I will not say him nay. I will but tell him that I have not yet decided. Perhaps by fall Don Francisco will return. If not, then it were as well that you should wed Gorgoza."

She rose from her chair, and stood trying to find words that would not displease her father. Well she knew that opposition to his wishes would but make him more determined. She choked down the hot answer that came unbidden to her lips, but she had not found the words she wanted before he, taking her silence for consent, continued.

"You are a dutiful daughter," he said. "More dutiful than I had expected. It would not have surprised me had you gone into a tantrum in order that you might force me to choose Gorgoza or Francisco or some other cavalier to whom you had taken a foolish fancy. But you know well that I shall choose for your own good. If I were you I would not think about it. I shall tell you when I have decided. And at any rate we shall wait until the autumn."

CHAPTER XXI

DURING the winter the men in their frozen camp far beyond Cibola had grown more and more bold on their hunting trips, sometimes wandering for miles across the snow-covered plains in an effort to catch rabbits with which to eke out the supply of horseflesh. More and more common the pastime became, until half the camp, on fine days, would sometimes wander off, in pairs or threes or groups of four or five.

On one such fine day, when the sun rose bright in the east, and the air gave promise of a rise in the temperature, when the wind had sunk to the merest breeze, and the crust on the snow made walking easy, an exceptional number of men set out for the hunt. They wandered up stream and down, and many, heedless of the fact that the great snow-covered plains presented no land marks, wandered away from the little river's banks. The sun rose in a clear sky, and the breeze continued gentle, until the men were scattered for miles in every direction. And then, suddenly and without warning, the wind sprang up—a cold wind that whistled and sang, growing ever more boisterous and more frigid. Over the horizon rose a huge dark cloud that

covered the sky at inconceivable speed, darkening the sun and throwing a shadow over all the vast expanse of prairie. Snow began to fall, lightly at first, but rapidly increasing, and the driving wind swirled and drove the tiny frozen particles in little eddies, in long lines, in biting clouds across the smooth and frozen crust.

Fainter and fainter grew the light, wilder and wilder the wind, until the plain became a vast inferno of screaming blasts and biting, stinging snow. The men who had hunted up and down the stream staggered into camp by ones and twos, half blinded and nearly frozen. But those who had ventured out upon the prairie, unprotected and unguided, forced to drift with the storm or to lie down to freeze upon the snow, fared a different fate. A few there were who stumbled across the camp as the wind forced them, helpless and blinded, along their way. But for the others there was no hope. The wind shrieked and whistled from noon till dark, and through the dark till daylight. The snow, swept in great clouds across the plain, obscuring everything from sight. When night had come the fury of the storm seemed to increase, and when, at dawn, its strength was spent, an anxious camp waited for an opportunity to count the losses.

With difficulty Francisco and Fray Juan strode through the new drifts to the covered dugouts, and when the last one had been reached, when the last man who had returned was counted, Francisco

leaned against the frozen wall, his chin upon his chest, his hand across his eyes. A man stirred up the fire, and threw more wood upon it. Another left the dugout to bring water from the ice-bound stream, returning with his burden, and still Francisco stood against the wall, his face in his hands, his figure stooped. Finally he straightened up, lifted his face to the low and sagging rafters, and in a whisper, spoke.

"Madre de Dios," he said. "What have I done to deserve this punishment?"

Fray Juan rose from his seat before the fire, and placing his arm about the shoulders of the captain-general he slowly led him forth into the snow—out under the sky that shone clear and blue and cloudless after the day and night of storm. No sign did the day give of the tragedy, yet scattered somewhere under the drifts that reached in every direction to the horizon and beyond, lay thirty-eight men, who the morning before had lightheartedly set out to catch rabbits for their dinner.

And there had been other losses ere the spring came to break the cruel grip of winter, so when at last the band was ready to begin its journey, but forty-six there were to travel.

April had come before Francisco consented to begin the march, but for months preparations had been going on to make ready for the long and arduous journey. Packs were carefully made up.

Disposable articles were thrown aside. Armour was largely discarded, save what was considered vital. But a few muskets were retained, and each man was prepared to exert himself to the utmost as a pack animal. Swords and sword belts each man kept. Half a dozen cross bows, a dozen muskets, scattered casques and breastplates, and that was all that was retained for defense, save for Francisco, Carlos, and Alvarado. These three, realizing that with their armour they could stand against a horde of natives, had retained it, sacrificing the essentials they would otherwise have carried.

On the evening before they were to start on their return journey Francisco sat in the moonlight with Fray Juan and Carlos. Alvarado and Pedro were busy about the camp, seeing that the last preparations had been completed. The evening was cool and quiet, the moon bright, and the stream, as it ran past the camp, had filled its banks almost to overflowing with the water from the snow that had now faded from the plains.

"Our journey will be difficult," Francisco was saying, "for we dare not return through Cibola. Even had we still in our band the men with whom we came to this awful spot it would be dangerous, but as it is, with this tiny handful, we would be overcome by mere weight of numbers, with no faintest chance for our lives. So it seems best to me that we make our way to the west. From Cibola we have come to the north and east, so, should we

travel west until we reach the sea, we will have passed well to the north of our enemies, and then it will be possible to follow the coast line to Culiacan and Compostela. The journey is a long one, but we must win through. We have traveled a thousand leagues or more, and the route that I suggest for our return may be greater. But should it be a thousand leagues we must travel six leagues a day in order to reach New Galicia by October. I doubt our ability to do it, but that is the pace that I would set. Those of us who are left have passed through hardships that should make us fit for such a task. Our baggage is of the simplest, and as we advance methinks that we shall find many things that we now carry to be unnecessary. I have no doubt that many of the men will throw away their casques and breastplates ere we are long upon the way. But you, Carlos, with Alvarado and myself, must keep our armour, for with it we may be able to impress any new peoples that we meet, or if we are forced to fight against other savages such as inhabit Cibola it may be that we can save the day. For the service that we render in that respect we have a right to call upon our men to shoulder a little of the burden that would otherwise be ours. But we must get some sleep," he said as he arose, "else we shall hardly set the pace that will take us six leagues between to-morrow's dawn and sunset. Buenos noches."



For four weeks the shrunken band marched to the west, until at last the plains gave way to hills, the hills to mountains, and they found themselves in a valley about which towered lofty summits that were hidden in the clouds. For a fleeting moment a rift had appeared that gave the wanderers a glimpse of the dazzling summit that waited another three hundred years for a climber and a name—a huge and snow-capped mountain that rose in solitary grandeur above the valley through which they passed. They gazed in wonder, as countless thousands since have done, at the mighty pile that now is called Pike's Peak.

They wandered on, and passing into a valley they camped beside a torrent that foamed amid the rocks that cumbered its crooked course. Above them another mountain reared its rocky sides to bury its crest in the clouds that floated over it. Fish were in the stream, game among the rocks, and the travel-worn wanderers dropped their packs joyously.

The days of travel that lay behind them had been all but colourless. They had seen occasional natives that fled at their approach, and had thought a dozen times that they were followed. But no attacks had come, and none seemed imminent, for the natives had disappeared from sight during the two preceding days.

But, mindful of the lessons that had been learned, precautions were taken, and the camp was carefully

made in a sheltered spot that could be readily protected. Tired from their journey the men prepared their meal and sat contentedly about the fires.

Francisco, Carlos, and Alvarado had removed their armour, and were seated with Fray Juan apart from the others, while Pedro prepared a dinner of venison for them. Held on forked sticks the man carefully broiled the meat, while the others sat watching, tired and hungry, and well content with the progress that the band had made.

"We have done well, thus far," remarked Carlos. "Should we continue to do as well we shall arrive in Mexico City in October. But if we encounter many such mountains as these we have about us now, methinks our journey will be longer."

"Ah, Francisco—Mexico City! Just think what awaits us there."

"Yes," replied Francisco. "I have often thought. In Mexico City there is a Viceroy whose expedition I have lost—hundreds of whose men I have led to death—whose wealth I have squandered on an enterprise that failed. I have come and brought you with me, that I might find another Mexico, another land of gold. It is true that it was not merely the gold that I desired, but rather that which I could obtain once I had secured the gold. But gold it was that brought me. And scattered by the path along which I have led you, are many more than a thousand dead, all dead because I led—because I sought for gold."

"And there is in Mexico City the maid I love—who serves always as the torch to light my way when it has grown so dark. But with my failure as my only accomplishment I know better than to expect her father to give her me.

"Yes, I well know what awaits me there."

He stopped and sat watching Pedro as he prepared the venison.

"Our path has indeed been lined with troubles," remarked Fray Juan. "But even yet it may be that our purpose will be accomplished, for we are wandering in an unknown land—a land undreamed of by those who have not seen. Hundreds of leagues we have still to travel ere we reach the land we left. It may be that we shall see more wonders that we have not thought to see. One cannot tell."

"You seek to cheer me," laughed Francisco. "Ah, well, I appreciate your effort. Had it not been for your example I would long since have been broken by the troubles we have faced. But now my main desire is to take back to Mexico the tiny handful that still survives. I shall lead no one here into dangers I can avoid. I have lost my opportunity, or what I thought was my opportunity. But I still hope to lead you and Alvarado and Carlos and the few others who are here, back to the land from which we came. I have often thanked the good God that these few have been spared to me.

"Without you, Padre, with your kindly heart, without Alvarado with his mighty arm, without

Pedro with his faithfulness, without Carlos, who has ever been and ever shall be closest to my heart, I know not what would come of me."

He stopped, his eyes still on Pedro as he pottered about the fire. No one spoke, and for the moment the little group sat listening to the crackle of the blaze. A faint twang, as of a bow string, sounded from behind a boulder beside the stream. A feathered arrow, silent as a breath, sped across the intervening space, and Carlos, reeling, fell backward from the rock on which he sat, the quivering arrow standing upright in his breast.

"Farewell," he whispered as he lay upon the rocks, "farewell. Take my love—my love—to Isabella," and he died as he tried to whisper further to Francisco and the priest who had leaped to his side.

In a moment the camp was in confusion. Alvarado, seizing his sword, bounded towards the rock from which the arrow had come, only to see an Indian leap lightly from behind it, run toward the foaming stream, cross it by leaping to a boulder that lay in midstream, and running lightly up the farther side, join a little group of others of his kind. They stood for a moment, watching Alvarado as he crossed the stream, and then trotted quickly away, to disappear among the rocks and pines of the mountain side.

Back in the camp Fray Juan and Francisco knelt beside the limp form, stricken dumb by the tragedy.

They raised their eyes to the sky as Fray Juan breathed a prayer. As he spoke the simple phrases, the clouds that obscured the mountain top above them parted for a moment, to reveal against the dark precipitous rock that formed the summit, two snow-filled gorges, intersecting in the form of a perfect cross, that stood out brilliantly in the sunlight as the clouds shifted and eddied in the wind.

"In hoc signo," muttered Fray Juan, as the clouds again closed around the mountain top. "The holy cross, Francisco. A sign that Carlos is with his fathers. A sign, too, that you and I shall again win back to Mexico City—that none of the dangers that lie between us and our goal shall serve to stop us."

Carlos was buried beneath a mound of rocks, marked by a cross made from a fallen tree, and the saddened party journeyed on. Intent on gaining the sea, that they hoped soon to find, they made their way still more into the west. But every day the mountains and the crags threw greater obstacles across their path. They made long detours to cross deep chasms, heart breaking climbs to cross cold passes, dangerous fords to cross the mountain torrents. For two months or more they struggled amid these constant difficulties, and came, in mid July, to the last of them. Across the mountains that lie in the state that we call Colorado they had wandered, forced to sleep in the open, sometimes upon frigid summits, sometimes beside the streams

that thread the maze of chasms, constantly on guard against the danger of an attack by natives, always faced by the possibility of starvation. And finally they had passed from what we know as Colorado into what is now called Utah, and struggling onward had reached the Colorado River where it is formed by the union of two others. Here they made a raft of logs and driftwood, and sought to ride the great river to its mouth, but hardly had their voyage begun before the smooth bosom of the giant stream carried them into roaring rapids that tore the frail raft into bits, and cast the crew ashore, without food or crossbows, armour or guns or powder, with their belongings scattered and lost in the wild and foaming flood.

And now they staggered on, into a land of heat and thirst, across a burning plain, where, just a little way ahead, there ever seemed to be great sheets of beautiful, cool water, that always faded, to reappear in the distance as the famished men staggered on and on and ever on across the waste.

They staggered along their way and turned to the south, hoping to reach again the river they had crossed, and after three days in the horrible desert they came upon a stream that ran a little way and sank into the sand. On and on they traveled, armed with crude bows and arrows made upon the way. Men had dropped here and there, hardly missed by their gaunt and famished companions. They had failed to keep the pace set by the determined

captain-general, who, with armour cast aside, carrying only a bow, half a dozen arrows, and a rabbit skin filled with water, strode ahead, leading those who could follow, but too weak to aid the ones who fell along the way. Another week they staggered on, Francisco far ahead, Fray Juan, leaning on a staff, following doggedly after, the others making the best of their way, straggling until the dozen that remained were scattered along a half a mile or more.

The stragglers did not notice Francisco as he came to a stop, nor in his astonishment was he able to see anything further than the edge of the chasm that had stopped him. But as he strained his eyes in an endeavour to realize what lay before him his mind suddenly grasped the sight, and breathless and astounded he gazed upon the tremendous splendour of the Grand Cañon of the Colorado.

Too amazed to speak, too stunned even to think, he stood at the edge of the awful gorge and leaned upon his bow, his mouth agape, his wasted form shaking as if with the palsy, his brain a ferment of conflicting emotions. Fray Juan approached, and was seized by the spell. One by one the others followed until they all stood gazing across the vastest of the world's wonders, too full for words, too amazed for thought.

Far below them the river flowed, a silver ribbon that sparkled in the sunlight. Piled about it, above it, and beyond, in unutterable majesty and profusion,

were the mesas, the precipices, the sheer and dizzy walls, that spread themselves into the distance beyond where the eye could see, brilliant in their slowly changing colours, their lights and shades—marvelous in their incomparable glory.

CHAPTER XXII

THE summer passed in Mexico City seemingly more slowly than had the winter passed before it. Day after day Dolores and Isabella waited for news of the expedition, hoping against hope each morning that before sunset there would be word of it. But ever with the sunset came renewed disappointment, and the two girls, their hearts torn with fears and sorrow, their eyes sometimes filled with tears, waited—hoping—fearing—believing—doubting.

True to his word, the Viceroy had told Gorgoza, when the officer had applied the second time for Dolores' hand, that as yet he was not prepared to make a decision.

"She is my only daughter," he had said. "It is hard for me to part with her. But I do not mean to spurn your offer. She is young, and it will do no harm to wait till autumn."

And Gorgoza, satisfied by the implied promise, waited, biding his time, content with what the future seemed to offer.

September came and went, October passed, and still no word came from the expedition that had left nearly three years before. Messengers arrived oc-

casionally from Compostela, and late in November one came from Culiacan, but no word was brought of the army. Two mad men who said that they were Don Francisco Coronado and Fray Juan, had staggered into Culiacan a day or two before the departure of the messenger, but their madness was apparent, and they were sent upon their way, to babble their wild tales to the inhabitants of the countryside. Every man in the garrison at Culiacan knew both the captain-general and the priest by sight, but these tattered crazy men were not they. From whence the two had come no one knew. But it was surmised that they were wanderers who had been lost from the army, and had gone stark, staring mad in the desert as they tried to make their way back into Mexico. But aside from these two gaunt, unbalanced creatures there had been no one of the expedition's members to return, and there was no word to tell of the land into which they had disappeared, for the tales brought by the madmen were wild and palpably untrue.

It was on an evening late in December ere Gorgoza went again to the Viceroy to speak for Dolores' hand.

"Your Excellency," he began, when he had seated himself across the table from the old man in the candle-lighted study, "already I have asked twice for the hand of your daughter in marriage. The last time that I spoke you bade me wait until autumn. This I have done, and have waited through the

autumn into winter. Again I come, with the same request once more upon my lips."

Mendoza sat silent until the almost spent hour glass let drop its final grain of sand. He slowly reversed the glass, watched the new flow as it began, and then leaned back in his chair.

"Gorgoza," he said. "You are not a father, and so you cannot know a father's feelings, nor is it possible that I can explain them so that you can know just how I feel.

"You know well that I trust you. Long have I shown you that. Despite the jealousies and envies that you arouse in many men, who wish to supplant you, I still keep you in my household. So you must not take offense if it is hard for me to say that I consent. I have no doubt I seem to be a hard, unloving man, and yet my heart is filled with love for Dolores. Long has she been without her mother for whom this land was far too rough—who died but a few months after we landed. And since then I have loved my daughter with all the love I have, although I have no doubt I seem often to forget her.

"It seems but a little while since she was a babe in her mother's arms. I find it hard to realize that she is now a woman, fit and ready to have children of her own—

"But I forget. I should not show my inmost feelings as I do. It is not meet. But it is seldom that I allow myself the pleasure, and so long have

I withheld my feelings from the sight of others that I am said to have no feelings.

"Yes, Gorgoza. I consent. But do not hurry me. All this shall be arranged, but I would not be hurried. I must attend to many things. And too, I must inform Dolores. She does not object. Already have I spoken to her of it."

"She does not object?" questioned Gorgoza, in amazement, his tone betraying his surprise.

"Nay," replied Mendoza. "And did you think she did? Nay, she is a dutiful daughter. She well knows that I have only her interest in mind, and that my choice is for the best. She will consent." The Viceroy laughed. "She *must* consent," he continued, "for already I have given you my word."

* * * * *

It was nearly noon of the next day before the Viceroy sent for Dolores. Señora de Estrada was suffering from rheumatism, and little did she interfere with the two girls. The messenger found them walking in the garden, and, bowing, informed Dolores that her father wished to see her in his study. She inclined her head to the attendant.

"I shall come at once," she said, her tone betraying none of her inmost feelings. But her self-possession could not keep the colour in her cheeks as, instinctively, she recognized the reason for the summons. She waited until the attendant had dis-

appeared, and threw her arms about Isabella, burying her face upon the shoulder of her friend.

"Isabella," she sobbed, "the time has come."

"The time for what?" asked Isabella, feigning ignorance, while as certain of the meaning of the summons as Dolores herself.

"Gorgoza—" sobbed Dolores. "Gorgoza—" She threw back her head, and dashed the tears from her eyes. "What a fool am I!" she cried. "I weep as if my tears would help me. I will not wed him, so that, at least I need not fear. It may be that I shall die upon my poniard, but certain it is that I will not be his wife. Come, Isabella. Come with me to my father."

The two girls set off through the garden, Dolores half a step ahead, Isabella following, but uncertain of the reception that she would receive from the Viceroy, when he had asked but for Dolores. Without waiting to be announced Dolores flung open the door into the study, and, still followed by Isabella, walked into the room.

"You sent for me?" she asked, as she saw her father at his desk.

"For you," he replied, "but not for Isabella."

"Yes," returned Dolores, "I know. The attendant said it was for me. But I asked Isabella to come with me."

For a moment the Viceroy looked at the two girls.

"If you do not object to Isabella's hearing what I have to tell you, she may stay," he said.

"I do not mind," replied Dolores. "If she were not here I would go at once to tell her."

Again the Viceroy paused. He fingered the quill with which he had been writing.

"Señor Gorgoza," he began, "has again asked for your hand. Twice before, he has spoken, and each time I have put him off. This time, as I told you I would do several months since, I have accepted his offer. No arrangements have yet been made, but he is already informed that I am willing."

He stopped, and for a moment there was not a sound in the room. Isabella stood with wide-open eyes, her bosom heaving with excitement and with fear for Dolores. Dolores, with her arm about Isabella's waist, let fall her eyes until they rested on the floor, and save for the paleness of her cheek, gave no sign of her feelings. The Viceroy glanced up, and mistaking her silence for consent, spoke again.

"I am glad," he said, "that you do not object. My daughter is most dutiful."

Dolores raised her eyes, her whole expression changing.

"I am not dutiful!" she cried. "Nor will I be. I will not marry Señor Gorgoza. Sooner than be wed to that hateful creature I will die by my own hand. Already I have told him so, and now I tell it you. Ere this would I have spoken, save that I have hoped this day would never come. But it has come, and now I tell you—I refuse."

The Viceroy's face bore a puzzled frown as he listened. So certain had he been that Dolores would not object that her refusal staggered him. So surprised was he that for a moment he forgot to grow angry. But at last the position that he occupied became clear to him. He was her father, and was being openly and brazenly defied. He rose from his chair, and leaned across the table, his frown deep, the muscles of his jaws moving until his beard bristled. While his heart beat a score of times he stood looking at his daughter, beside whom Isabella stood, cowering, as Dolores' eyes flashed back her determination.

"How dare you refuse?" he shouted at last. "Begone. And when you come to see me here tomorrow morning come prepared to ask forgiveness. I will not be defied by my own daughter. Begone."

Dolores glared back at him.

"I will not marry this villain of a man that you have picked for me!" she cried. "Nor will I crawl before you to ask for your forgiveness. And ere I am forced to do either I'll die upon my dagger."

Without giving him time for a reply she seized Isabella's hand, and swept out of the room.

The Viceroy bit his lip and sat down, still frowning heavily, his feelings a curious mixture of anger and perplexity. And for an hour he sat there, without coming nearer to the solution that he sought.

In the meantime Dolores and Isabella had gone back to the garden, where Dolores walked up and

down the gravel paths, dragging Isabella with her, while she repeated again and again what she had told her father.

* * * * *

Half an hour before the Viceroy had called Dolores to his study, two weather-worn men crossed the long causeway leading into the city. They were dressed in nondescript clothes, ill-fitting and stained, and their whole appearance, from their heavy beards to their travel worn shoes, proved that they had traveled on foot for many, many leagues. They strode into town, and having reached the city streets, threw away their staffs, and made a few attempts to improve their rough appearance, ere they continued toward the square beside which stood the palace.

Little attention did they attract as they strode through the streets, for Mexico was filled with wanderers in 1542, and in any of the cities were to be found adventurers whose luck had failed them, and who were forced sometimes even to beg for alms, that they might keep from starving. So the heavily bearded, ragged pair strode on, unnoticed save by an occasional dog that snapped at their heels, or by a girl here and there, who, leaning from a window, saw in the unkempt travelers a source of amusement.

They strode on until they reached the square, and as they turned out of the street along which

they had been walking, into the open space, they were all but ridden down by a mounted gentleman and his attendant who were galloping toward the causeway.

"Sons of dogs," cried the rider, as the two leaped from his way. "Keep from underfoot." And without another backward glance he galloped down the street, and disappeared around a turn.

The pair stood for a moment looking after him, and finally the older of the two nodded, and started across the square.

"Ah, well Francisco," he remarked, "Gorgoza is here, at any rate. So Mexico City will have at least one familiar face for us to look upon."

"Yes, Padre," replied Francisco. "But there are other faces that I would sooner see."

"No doubt," replied the other. "But keep up your spirits, and we shall see them. We have nearly reached the mansion."

Across the square the two strode, to the open gate of the palace courtyard where a guard stopped them.

"Halt," he cried. "You cannot enter here."

The two stopped, and the priest spoke.

"Inform His Excellency the Viceroy that Don Francisco de Coronado and Fray Juan are here."

The man-at-arms grinned, and bowed in mock solemnity.

"Your servant regrets," he replied between his snickers, "that His Excellency the Viceroy cannot

find time to see Your Excellency and the worthy padre. But at present His Excellency the Viceroy is busily engaged in building coffers in which to store the gold and jewels with which Your Excellency and the worthy padre are so heavily laden."

"Stand aside," ordered Francisco, as he made a move to enter.

Immediately the man was on his guard, his heavy halberd pressed against Francisco's belt.

"Another move," he cried, "and I shall run you through. Already have we been told of the madmen who call themselves Don Francisco and Fray Juan. Get you gone, or I will run you through even though you make no other move."

"You see," said Francisco, turning to the priest. "Even here they say that we are mad. What can we do."

"Come," replied Fray Juan. "Come. Me-thinks I know a way."

Together the two strode away from the gate, Fray Juan leading the way along the wall to where the trees in the garden thrust their branches over its top.

"Whither are you leading?" asked Francisco.

"There is a door cut through the garden wall," replied the priest. "Before we left, seldom was it locked, for through it the gardeners came and went, with their tools and supplies. Perhaps we can gain an entrance there."

A little farther and they stopped outside the

heavy oaken door. Fray Juan lifted the latch and pushed. For half an inch it gave, and then the sound of the bolt as it struck the metal strap that held it told them that it was locked. A second time the priest pushed, and then turned and leaned against the wall.

"'Tis locked," he muttered. "And certainly there is no other entrance, save at the gate. And there we cannot go, else we shall be run through."

The two stood silent by the door, each trying his best to solve the problem. The wall was far too high for them to climb, yet no other way seemed open to them.

As they stood in silence, wondering what their next move would be, they heard footsteps on the gravel of the path beyond the doorway in the wall. They strained their ears to listen, and heard a woman's voice, indistinct at first, and then more plain, until it passed close beside the door. Gradually it had become more clear, until the two, listening eagerly beyond the wall, could understand the words.

"*I will not marry him!*" said the voice, and Francisco's heart leaped as he heard it. "Nor can they force me to. I will hold out——"

"Dolores!" cried Francisco.

The voice beyond the wall stopped.

"Dolores!" called Francisco, again.

"Who is calling me?" asked Dolores, her heart in her throat, her knees weak beneath her.

"It is Francisco," called her lover.

She threw herself against the heavy, rusted bolt, endeavouring to thrust it back, but almost at once was seized by Isabella.

"Dolores," she whispered. "How do we know that this is Francisco. It may be someone come to force his way into the garden for no good purpose."

"Nay, nay," replied Dolores, still struggling with the bolt. "Francisco is there. I must let him in."

"If it is Francisco," insisted Isabella, "why does he not come through the gateway of the court?"

Dolores, finding it beyond her strength to move the bolt, sank on her knees, shaken with sobs.

"I do not care," she cried. "I do not care. He says that he is Francisco, and rather would I face an army of villains than risk sending him away."

Isabella stepped up to the door, and tried to look out through a crack that ran across it. But little could she see, save a part of a bearded face. At last she called to the pair outside.

"If it be truly Francisco who is there, then give us proof that you are he."

Francisco looked questioningly at Fray Juan.

"The ring," cried the priest. "The ring. The ring Dolores gave you ere you left. Throw it to them over the wall."

Francisco tore the ring from off his finger, and tossed it high above the tiles that covered the crest of the wall. It fell upon the other side, ringing

against a stone as it dropped. For a moment the girls searched for it, and then Dolores seized it from the gravel in which it lay. Immediately she recognized the heavy gold and the crest of the Mendozas.

"It is he," she cried. "It is he. Isabella, aid me to release the bolt."

For a moment the two girls struggled with the rusted iron, and finally it scraped in its groove, and slid slowly back. The ponderous door swung in upon its hinges, and Francisco bounded through to seize Dolores in his arms.

CHAPTER XXIII

FRAY JUAN closed the gate and bolted it before he turned to Isabella where she stood leaning against the wall, her hand over her eyes, silent.

"My daughter," he said, softly. "I do not bring good news."

She turned, and dropped her hands.

"I know, padre," she replied. "Long have I known that Carlos was dead."

He looked at her in amazement.

"How did you know?" he asked.

"I dreamed that he was dead," she answered. "And when I awoke I knew the dream was true. It was in the spring that he died when all the world should have been happy. I know it, and yet I know not how I know."

"It is true," replied the priest.

"Yes," she agreed, "'tis true. But even knowing as I did that he would not return I cannot help but feel the shock as if it had come again. Come, tell me of it, and let us leave Dolores and Francisco."

Together the two walked down the path, and disappeared beyond a clump of bushes.

Not a word had Dolores said, since Francisco had seized her in his arms. Overcome by her emotions she seemed almost to faint away—to be carried into another world—transplanted and too filled with joy to speak, overpowered by his return and the pressure of his arms about her, content to rest her head upon his breast, conscious only of the beating of her heart and of his presence.

They unconsciously strolled to the stone seat beneath the rose bush and the afternoon had all but gone before the long, long story had been told.

"I must tell our story to His Excellency," said Francisco at last.

"Is there no other way?" asked Dolores. "Can we not flee? For now I am promised to Gorgoza, and my father will never give me to you."

"He must be told," replied Francisco. "It cannot be that I should prove false to him in that. Let us go to Isabella and Fray Juan, that they may give us their advice."

They had talked while the sun sank from the zenith nearly to the horizon. Now they rose, and crossed the garden to the arbour, where Isabella and Fray Juan sat silent, their minds far away beside a heap of rocks beneath which Carlos lay at the foot of the Mountain of the Holy Cross.

"The Viceroy must be told," was the priest's advice when he was asked. "Do you, Dolores," he continued, "take the word to him that we are here. Francisco and I shall go to my old cell, and there

food can be sent us, and there we can await his call. Go, my daughter, and pray that all of this may yet turn out to be less bad than now appears."

Dolores left, accompanied by Isabella, while Francisco and Fray Juan crossed the court and, entering the palace, strode through the halls unhindered by the servants that they passed, who merely gazed at the two with wondering eyes, not thinking to impede their determined progress, yet surprised that two such rough and ragged men had gained an entrance.

Dolores found her father still in his study, sitting at his table, sunk in thought. She entered without knocking, and he did not glance around at her until she had crossed the room and stopped beside the table. And after he had looked up he did not speak, but instead gazed questioningly at her, as if waiting for her to break the silence.

"I have news of great importance," she said at last, and stopped.

"News?" he questioned. "What news?"

"Don Francisco and Fray Juan have returned," she replied slowly.

He sat up quickly, and leaned across the table, his fists clenched, his lips parted, his eyes wide.

"Where did you hear it?" he asked.

"I have but just come from them."

"Where are they?"

"They are now in Fray Juan's cell, where they are eating for the first time since this morning."

"How have they returned? Who has come with them? Where is the army? Tell me, girl, tell me. Be not so slow."

"They have come alone," she returned, "on foot, from a land almost as far distant as is Spain."

"Did they find the gold they sought? Do they bring the wealth they went to find?"

"Nay," replied Dolores. "They come in rags, penniless, and alone."

"Send them to me," cried the old man. "Send them at once." He pulled at a bell rope and an attendant from the anteroom opened the door. "Send for Señor Gorgoza, at once," he shouted as the man appeared. "Dolores, go now. Bring the two here. Do not delay. We shall hear their story—we must hear their story. Go. Bring them."

He had left the table, and was striding up and down the room, excited, impatient, urging Dolores to hasten, calling again for Gorgoza, even after Dolores had left the room, and he was alone.

Gorgoza was the first to come. An attendant announced him, and Mendoza met him as he entered the room.

"Gorgoza," he cried. "They have returned. Don Francisco and Fray Juan are here. They have come."

"Here?" asked Gorgoza, aghast, his face blanched.

"Yes," replied the Viceroy. "I have but now

sent for them. They will be here presently. They have come in rags, without their army, with nothing. But wait. I do not know how they have come. Dolores repeated but a dozen words to me, and now has gone to get them."

"In rags?" asked Gorgoza, his white face colouring again. "In rags?" he repeated, smiling.

"Yes," said the Viceroy. "So I am told. But wait. They are coming. They will be here in a moment. Sit down, and we shall hear their story."

Even as they crossed the room to the chairs beside the table the door opened, and Francisco entered, followed by Fray Juan, Dolores, and Isabella. They stopped as the door closed behind them, and for a moment looked across the shadowed room that lay dim in the fading light of the early dusk. The Viceroy and Gorgoza seated themselves without a word, and the others stood silent, by the door. Finally the Viceroy rose and peered across the half-lighted room.

"Come nearer that I may see you," he ordered.

Francisco and Fray Juan strode across the room, and stopped in front of the table. Neither said a word, but merely looked into the wide eyes of the Viceroy, while Gorgoza leaned forward in his chair and chuckled very lightly to himself. For the time he took to draw a long, deep breath the Viceroy looked at the tattered pair. Then he sat down, and pulled the bell rope again. The attendant thrust his head at once through the door.

"Candles," ordered the Viceroy.

Again the old man looked at the two who stood erect and silent across the table from him.

"So at last you have returned," he said. The attendant entered, bearing two lighted candelabra, and the room was silent as he crossed it and set them carefully on the table.

"Tell me what has happened," ordered the Viceroy when the door had closed.

The girls tiptoed across the room, and stood on the opposite side of the Viceroy from where Gorgoza sat. Mendoza leaned back in his chair. Gorgoza crossed his knees and chuckled again, very softly. Dolores and Isabella stood with their arms about each other, gazing intently at Francisco as he stood beside Fray Juan—erect, bronzed, tattered.

"Our story is a long one," began Francisco. "And it is stranger than it is long. For three years we have wandered through a land more vast than half a hundred Spains—than twenty Mexicos. Through valleys and deserts, across plains and rivers, among mountains and mighty chasms we have wandered; through summer heat so great that men died from it; through winter cold so bitter that men froze; across deserts dry and without a sign of life; across plains covered for hundreds of leagues with grass, over which roamed countless thousands of great cattle, hairy and humpbacked; among natives, wild and ferocious, that slew and tortured, that pretended friendship and proved treacherous;

among marvels of nature so wonderful that even after seeing them it is hard to believe that we have seen.

"But I must begin with the beginning, that you may know the story of the past three years."

His audience was leaning forward intently, drinking in his every word, intent on hearing more, wrapped up in his story of marvels and adventures.

He led them from Compostela to Culiacan, and from that outpost up the coast and through the valley that had taken the army past the mountains; he led them on across the desert. He told them of the men who died of thirst and heat, of the cannon left behind as the horses grew too weak to haul them, of the stream that had been found, and of the city on the mesa that stood with its flat top high above the valley. He told the story of the attack, the massacre, the disappointed men when it was found that there were neither gold nor jewels, of the careless camp made up of men who refused to obey their officers, of the horrible night attack when a thousand screaming savages seemed to spring up from the very earth itself to fall upon the sleeping army. He told them of the months that had been spent in making friends of the inhabitants of the villages that had been called the "Seven Cities of Cibola" and of the stories they had heard of that other land of Quivera, wherein the natives made their very pots and pans of gold. He took them in his story across the endless plains, where roamed

the humpbacked cattle by thousands of thousands, and led them to the camp wherein they spent the second winter. He told them of the screaming, raging wind that swept unhindered across the prairie, and of the snow that covered the earth. He described the holes in which they lived, and repeated the story of the treacherous natives who would have left them all to freeze and starve in that far land.

He led them back across the prairie with the shrunken band, and brought them to the mountain that showed its mighty summit through the clouds. He told them of the camp beside the stream where Carlos breathed his last, a savage arrow standing upright in his breast. He told them, in a low and solemn voice, of the mountain top above them, upon which, as Carlos' spirit passed, they saw the snow-filled gorges that formed the Holy Cross. He led them through the cañons and over the mountains they had passed, he told them of the wanderings through deep furrows in the rocks in which the rivers ran. He brought them out at last and led them to the banks of the great stream upon which they had launched their frail and flimsy raft—upon which they had hoped to voyage down to the sea, and told them of the roaring rapids that tore the raft into a thousand pieces, and flung them half drowned upon the shore to perish, without guns or food, armour or crossbows. He led them away from the great river out upon another desert, in the

heat of which the few who still remained staggered, and where some fell down to die. He led them to the stream that flowed a little way and sank into the sand and disappeared, and once more he led them out upon the desert across which the handful of wanderers had fought their way.

And at last he told them of the precipice that marked the desert's edge and the mighty gorge that lay there.

"Before us lay a chasm so vast that I can give you no remote suggestion of its size. Far down in its vast depths there ran a river, that seemed from where we stood to be a tiny stream, across which a man might leap, or even step. And yet when we had clambered down those awful precipices, from which the mighty Alvarado fell to find his death upon the rocks below, we found that tiny stream to be a mightier river than any are that flow in Mexico or Spain; we found a river with so swift a flood that when we made a raft upon which we could cross it, we were swept along by the mighty current from morning almost until night before we could land upon the farther bank. And when we had succeeded in crossing we found ourselves at the foot of a precipice so great that when Pedro had climbed but a fraction of the way up to the top we could not hear his voice as he called down to us.

"For three weeks we struggled to climb from out the gorge, living for that time on berries and a few

rabbits that we sometimes caught, and finally we found a way—a way that lay up narrow cracks across the rocks, and little ledges that we found here and there. And now and then a level spot that from below could not be seen, and yet might be so great that all this mansion, and another one as great could rest thereon. And when at last Fray Juan and I sat alone upon the rim and looked down into that vast gorge where first Alvarado, and then Pedro and the others had been dashed to death as we clambered down into its depths and up again, we tried to find a measure for its depth. For two days we remained there on the edge, watching its strange and wonderful colours, its marvelous great hills, its changing lights and shadows, and we left with the belief that from that river up to the dizzy ledge on which we sat was less, perhaps, than half a league, but not much less."

He paused and Gorgoza leaned over to the Viceroy and whispered in his ear. The old man seemed startled, and searched in the chest of papers that sat beside the desk. He pulled from it a crude drawing, and laid it on the table. For a moment he looked at it, and then glanced up at Francisco, and passed the drawing to him.

"Does the gorge you tell us of resemble that?" he asked.

Francisco took the drawing and stooped over to the light; and Fray Juan leaned down beside him. Together they examined it.

"I do not know," replied Francisco at last. "The gorge we saw is so vast that we have seen only a small part of it. It may be that this is some part that we did not see. The strange flat topped hills are here, and with them the straight walls and the bands of colour. But from this sketch one could never guess its enormous size nor yet its colour or its beauty."

"He admits it," cried Gorgoza. "It is the same. And yet he says that its walls stand half a league above the river, while de Alarcon, who measured it, and had that drawing made, has told us that they are only five times as high as is the pyramid of Cholula. This man lies, Your Excellency. We have proof here that he lies. And if he lies about this river and the cliffs that line it, how do we know that the rest of what he tells is true? The terrible deserts, the endless plains, the strange cattle, the awful winter, the mighty mountain and the mountain with the Holy Cross marked on its topmost pinnacle. Through all his story he has told of nothing that is not greater and more wonderful than anything of which we have ever before heard. And now he tells of this great cañon, which is, indeed, great, as de Alarcon has told us, but which is but a scratch in the earth compared with what this man of lies describes."

The group had listened spellbound as Gorgoza spoke, all save Francisco. With the first word of Gorgoza's that questioned his veracity Francisco

clenched his fists, bit his lip, and frowned. As the officer continued Francisco grew more tense, and when at last the tirade had been finished he leaped toward his enemy, intent on choking the life from his body. But despite his intention to prove Francisco a liar, Gorgoza had not reckoned without some knowledge of the man he opposed, and ere Francisco could reach him he had whipped out his rapier, and stood prepared to run his assailant through. Francisco made a move to draw, but found himself defenseless, his sword gone long since, and even the staff, with which he had defended himself for weeks, cast aside in the streets. He drew back, unable to attack the glittering blade with his bare hands.

The Viceroy pulled the bell rope violently and the attendant again thrust his head through the door.

"Bring me half a dozen men-at-arms," shouted the Viceroy. "At once. Bring them here."

He glared at Francisco.

"I made you captain-general of an army," he said, "which you have led into a wilderness and lost. Alone, save for a priest, you have returned. And now to ward off the punishment you knew to be your due you come to me and tell me lies. A thousand lies you tell, to cover up your weakness and your failure.

"No failure could be more complete than this of yours. With all your men dead in a strange land

you come to me and tell me lies to shield your worthless head. Lies," he shouted, "lies. All lies."

The door swung open, and the men-at-arms strode in, their armour rattling, and their halberds ready.

"Take this man," shouted the Viceroy, "take him to the deepest dungeon——"

"Your Excellency," cried Fray Juan. "This is madness."

"Away, priest," ordered the old man.

"But every word that he has told you is the truth," insisted Juan. "I know, for I too, have seen all that he tells you of. It is the truth."

"False priest," cried the Viceroy, "can you not see that we have proof that part of this tale is false? And do you still tell me that I am wrong? Away. But for the Church that protects you, you too should be thrown into the deepest dungeon of the palace.

"Take him away," ordered the Viceroy, turning to the hesitating men-at-arms. "I will deal with him to-morrow!"

And as Francisco led by the men-at-arms and followed by Fray Juan, passed the heavy oaken door, Dolores fell limp at the feet of Isabella, while Gorgoza smiled and slowly slid his rapier back into its jeweled scabbard.

CHAPTER XXIV

FOR over a month Francisco lay in the dungeon into which he had been thrown, the decision as to his punishment unknown to him. Nor had Dolores or Fray Juan been able to get to him any word. It was rumoured about the palace that the Viceroy vacillated in his decision between returning the prisoner to Spain in chains and garroting him forthwith. But Dolores, crouched in a dark corner of her father's study behind a heavy chair, had overheard a conversation between the Viceroy and Gorgoza in which the indecision in the old man's mind seemed to have been overcome.

"He has proved himself a liar," Gorgoza had said, "and has lost every man in a strong army that was given him. Surely, death is far too good for him. Many a general has suffered that penalty for less."

"I know, I know," replied the Viceroy. "But he was young and inexperienced. I should have chosen another. And furthermore, he is a favourite of His Majesty. Rather would I return him to Spain in order that the King pass judgment, than risk the anger of His Majesty."

"There is a ship now lying at Vera Cruz that

sails for Spain a fortnight hence. I shall send the prisoner down, under heavy guard, and put him in the care of the captain of that ship, with orders to deliver him in person to His Majesty. And with him must be sent a report of all this matter, setting forth all that we have learned, and the proof we have that he has lied.

"To-day is Monday. The ship leaves Vera Cruz on Monday two weeks hence. Do you, Gorgoza, make the arrangements necessary. Have a strong guard, and let them leave Mexico City one week from to-day. They will then arrive in Vera Cruz with time to spare."

"My duty to Your Excellency," replied Gorgoza, "requires that I obey. But justice will not be done, if this liar return to Spain to be granted the leniency of His Majesty."

"Gorgoza," returned the Viceroy, his brow clouding. "There are times when I think that you are not trustworthy, and when you suggest that the decisions of His Catholic Majesty ever are unjust I cannot but feel that you are lacking in the sense of duty that makes a soldier better than most other men. Perhaps your remark was but from the mouth and not the heart. For this once I shall take it so. But beware of making other such remarks."

"I meant no offense," Gorgoza answered, flushing. "I could not think of questioning my King."

"Then get you gone," ordered Mendoza, "and

see that you carry out my orders to the letter in order that I may forget your blunder."

As soon as she could creep undetected from the room, Dolores fled to Fray Juan. Señora de Estrada was still making the most of her pains, and the girls had no one to check their comings and goings. So it was that Dolores was able to go directly to the priest's cell, despite the fact that Juan was in bad standing with the Viceroy and consequently with the duenna.

"Padre," said Dolores when the heavy door closed behind her. "Francisco is to be sent to Spain by a ship that sails a fortnight from to-day. He leaves for Vera Cruz on Monday next, under heavy guard. What are we to do? What are we to do?"

The priest crossed his hands behind him, and strode the length of the narrow cell, his head bowed. He stopped before the window, looking out upon the branches of the tree that thrust themselves across it. Presently he turned.

"My daughter," he said. "I have a plan. It may, perhaps, be one with which you will not agree. But I shall tell you, that you may know.

"Should Francisco be sent to Spain, the King will decide upon his punishment. It may be that the punishment will be severe, and it may be that the King will pardon him. I know not. But knowing you, my daughter, I believe that you would rather be with him, whether he suffer from His

Majesty's displeasure or benefit from his leniency. Is that not true?"

"Yes, Padre," she replied. "But how can I go to Spain?"

"That is my plan," replied the priest.

He paused a moment, and sat down across the table from Dolores.

"For years," he continued, "I have aided His Excellency your father. I have made out papers of every description for him, and can again.

"Francisco leaves on Monday next for Vera Cruz, under guard. If you agree that my plan is worth a trial, you will get yourself a page's costume, and a horse. You will cut your hair and make yourself a boy. Then, on the Thursday night after Francisco leaves Mexico City, you will mount your horse, and ride with me to Vera Cruz. It will be difficult to reach the place by Monday, but it can be done. There are dangers, too, that lie along the way, but a big cape and heavy boots and a large hat will cover you well during the day, and we must choose well our stopping places at night. And you can carry pistols at your saddle bow, and a great sword swung also from your saddle, so that any one you pass along the way will think you a cavalier.

"And I shall make out papers to the captain of the ship, bidding him take you on board, and treat you well, as you are a person of position. Money we can secure, that you may pass it out freely, and buy your way into their graces, and if you but have

the boldness that I think you have it can all be done."

Dolores had been leaning across the table, her eyes shining, her heart pounding rapidly, her cheeks crimson.

"Padre," she cried. "Padre, do you think I can?"

"I am sure you can," he replied, "if you will risk the attempt. And I, in order to protect you, shall ride with you. Do you wish to try?"

"Yes, Padre, yes! I shall go now, and make my plans, with Isabella to aid me."

* * * * *

The week finally passed, and surrounded by a guard, Francisco rode toward Vera Cruz. He rode dejectedly, but as he crossed the plaza he turned and saw a hand wave to him from a window in the palace. He waved in return, and disappeared into the street leading to the causeway, his brow clouded, his heart torn with suffering, and filled with a great and hopeless longing.

Tuesday passed and Wednesday, and finally Thursday morning dawned. Dolores had finished her preparations, and Fray Juan had secured two horses, which he led, in the quiet of the early dawn, through the door in the garden wall, and tied behind a bush near by, the saddle and saddle blankets, pistols and swords piled near them in a heap. This done, the priest went back to his cell, to see to it

that the papers that he had made out were complete, to their most minute detail.

The morning became noon, and the afternoon came and went. Slowly the sun sank, until the clouds in the west were pierced through with fiery red, and golden bars of light shot like great streamers to fall aslant the earth and cast the shadows to the east. Dusk came, and with the first star Dolores had finished dressing in the costume she had secured.

"In a few minutes I must go," she said to Isabella, as the two girls sat beneath the canopy of the great bed in Dolores' room. "Fray Juan is to go to the garden and saddle the horses, and when he whistles I am to come. I wish you too, were coming."

"No, my friend," replied Isabella. "I would not go. There is nothing in Spain for which I care. When you have gone I shall take the veil, as I would have done even had you remained. I could not go to Spain. It would seem to me that I were untrue to Carlos, as he lies at the foot of the Mountain of the Holy Cross. No. I shall remain."

They went to the window and stood looking out upon the garden. For half an hour they stood there, their arms about each other, tears in their eyes, but silent. And at last they heard a whistle, faintly from the bushes at the far end of the garden. Another followed, and Dolores turned.

"Fray Juan is calling," she said. "I must go. Farewell, my friend, farewell."

Isabella kissed her softly on the lips and released her.

"God be with you," she whispered. "Farewell."

Silently Dolores left the room, and tiptoed down the long corridor. She stood at the top of the stairs for a moment, looking down to see that the way was clear. A servant crossed the hall below, and she shrank back until he had disappeared. She crept to the foot of the stairs, and seeing the hall empty, crossed to the door leading to the garden. For a moment she stood looking out into the night. A bush threw a heavy shadow across the path, and as she watched it she thought she saw a movement in the darkness. Instinctively she drew the little dagger she had carried for so long, and held it firmly in her hand. For a minute or more she watched the shadow, and finally convinced that there was nothing there, stepped through the door, and on to the gravel of the walk. Three steps she took, and stopped, her breath gone, her heart leaping, for there before her stood Gorgoza as he had stepped from the shadow of the bush.

"Ah, my pretty one," he laughed softly. "Why are you dressed in jack boots? You have become a man. But then, it does not matter." He stepped forward and seized her in his arms. "It is better so, for as a man I may take you to my rooms and learn why it is that you would flee. I would not have known, but your maid, who took a gold piece for the news, informed me that you had collected

the garments of a man in your room, and that, listening at the keyhole, she had heard you say that you would leave to-night. But there must be more to the story than that. So come and tell me. You shall stay the night with me instead of with whoever else you may have chosen, for if you insist upon disgrace it were better that your future husband should be the other party to it. Come."

He tightened his grip about her, as she struggled to free herself, and made an effort to pick her up in order to carry her along the path. A sparkling jewel on the handle of her dagger caught her eye. She had forgotten that she held the little blade. Suddenly her fear became determination.

"Release me," she whispered tensely. "Release me or I shall kill you!"

"Oh, my little vixen," he laughed. "Your threat is fearful, but I shall not release you."

He seized her wrist and pressed it brutally. She winced with pain, and he pressed once more. The girl struggled in his arms, and tried to retain her grip upon the dagger, but his strength was too great, the pain too sharp, and slowly her hand opened and the blade dropped with a little metallic clang upon the gravel path.

* * * *

Below the level of the courtyard lay the dungeons of the palace. Dark and slimy passages connected a series of dripping cells, wherein were filthy, un-

shorn creatures that had been men. Here and there a dungeon was empty, save for the rats creeping about in search of food and finding only shallow pools of water in the depressions of the rough stone floors, into which the seepage from the earth above dropped, tinkling in the darkness.

At the end of this maze a tiny cell, more fortunate than the others, looked up to the sky above through a heavy iron grating at the end of an air passage leading down from the corner of the courtyard. As darkness had fallen, the prisoner, placing his stool beneath the air duct, had swung himself with an adeptness significant of long practice, into the narrow passage, and by pressing his knees and elbows against the stone sides, he had climbed slowly up the ten or twelve feet that led to the grating. He paused for a moment to listen, and hearing no sound, he pulled a small knife from a cranny in the masonry, and set himself to work scratching at the stone in which the grating was set. For two years the unshaven creature had crept each evening up to this grating, to scratch at the stone with the knife he held. The blade was all but gone, only a fraction of it still adhering to the handle. But worn as was the blade, the stone that supported the grating was yet more worn, and the half mad prisoner whispered to himself as he worked.

"I have nearly finished—nearly—nearly finished. And when I have pulled these bars from their

places, and climbed into the court I'll make up for the time I've spent in this vile hole.

"'Your hat shall be filled with gold,' he told me, 'and your saddle bags with silver. You shall be given passage back to Spain. And all you must do is say that you, Gonzales, are to blame—that you brought me false news.'

"But I'll soon be free again—I'll soon be free."

He stopped scratching and seized the grating. He tugged at it and it moved. Again he tugged, and again it moved. He threw all his weight upon it, and with unexpected suddenness the stone released its hold, precipitating him down the shaft into the dungeon below. The stool crashed beneath the impact, and half stunned by the grating as it struck his head he lay on the dank stone floor, clutching the grating and whimpering.

For several minutes he lay there, and then rose slowly to his feet. Standing the remnants of the stool beneath the shaft once more, he swung himself upward, and edged his way again through the passage. He stopped as his head emerged, and wedged himself tightly in the narrow opening, gazing craftily about to get his bearings. Above him through the window to the guardroom, a ray of light shone, falling faintly on the pavement of the court, and as he listened he heard a chair move—then footsteps as a man crossed the room within, extinguished the candle, and passed out the door.

He saw the man as he entered the court, and

despite the darkness and the cape that covered him, recognized Gorgoza. Slowly he crept from the airshaft, and listening intently for the footsteps as they fell upon the cobblestones, followed silently. Across the court and into a passage he followed the officer, and through the passage to the garden, where he heard the hated footsteps plainly as they crunched in the gravel of the paths. With the keenness of an unbalanced mind he followed, careful to walk upon the grass, and to keep well behind where the darkness shielded him. Across the garden he followed, until the footsteps ceased by a bush near the door leading to the great hall of the palace.

Slowly the madman crept closer to the spot where Gorgoza was waiting. So careful were his movements that not a sound of them reached his own ears, and Gorgoza, unsuspecting, stood peering through the darkness at the doorway through which he expected to see Dolores come. Gonzales crept closer, until, save for the bush that stood between them, he could almost have touched his enemy by reaching out his hand.

For ten minutes or more the two waited, and then Dolores stood suddenly in the doorway, indistinct and unrecognizable to Gonzales, but expected by the officer. She paused and then stepped out on to the path to be confronted by Gorgoza.

Gonzales shrank back in the darker shadows, uncertain and half afraid, but stole nearer as he heard

the voices of the two. He watched the struggle, and caught the glint of light on the jeweled hilt of Dolores' dagger. He watched the hand that held it, and quivered with the desire to possess that slender blade. He heard Dolores' threat, and watched as Gorgoza forced her to drop the dagger upon the path. Like a shadow he slid toward it. Unknown to either of them he seized it, and rising behind Gorgoza as the officer stood holding the struggling girl, seized his throat with a hard and sinewy hand, and bent the choking man backward. Dolores slipped from Gorgoza's loosened arms, and Gonzales silently pressed the dagger against the officer's breast. The stricken man gave one spasmodic move and collapsed in the grip of the silent maniac, who held him for a moment and then allowed him to slide gently to the path, where the faint light shone upon the jeweled hilt as it stood upright in Gorgoza's heart.

Gonzales watched Dolores as she shrank away from him, and then, whimpering and whining, he disappeared amid the bushes, and ran swiftly back across the garden, through the passage leading to the court, and across the court to the airduct leading to the dungeon. Hastily he slid through it, and dropped into the cell below, to sit shaking with fear —mad beyond hope.

Dolores did not pause to think. She dashed down the path to the spot where Fray Juan stood waiting, the horses saddled and ready.

"Gorgoza is killed," she whispered. "Someone crept from the bushes and killed him as he tried to stop me."

"It is well," growled Juan. "But we must hurry, for fear we shall be followed. Let us go."

He opened the door in the wall as Dolores mounted, and closed it when they had passed through. For a moment they listened. Everything was silence. Juan mounted.

"Let us go," he repeated, and with a flash of sparks they galloped across the plaza and into the street that led toward Vera Cruz.

* * * * *

Late the next morning His Excellency the Viceroy pulled the bell cord that hung beside his desk.

"Request Señor Gorgoza to come," he ordered when the attendant had entered.

It was half an hour later before the attendant returned.

"Señor Gorgoza cannot be found, Your Excellency," he said. "He was not in his rooms last night, and his servants know nothing of his whereabouts."

Another half an hour passed, and then, suddenly the door burst open without warning, and the attendant entered breathless and excited.

"Your Excellency," he cried. "Your Excellency."

"What is it, man?"

"The Señor is dead! Dead in the garden!"

"Dead?" cried the old man, rising. "Dead?"

"Yes, Your Excellency, dead with a dagger in his heart!"

The Viceroy quickly crossed the room.

"Lead me to the place," he ordered.

Across the anteroom and down the corridor he followed, and through the door leading to the garden, to where Gorgoza's body lay upon the gravel of the path, surrounded by frightened servants. The Viceroy strode down the path, the servants scattering before him. He stopped beside the body and stooped over, plucking from the dead man's heart the dagger. He looked at it a moment.

"Madre de Dios," he muttered. "Dolores' dagger. Dolores' dagger that was her mother's."

The mansion was in a furor. Isabella and Señora de Estrada were sent for and questioned. The duenna knew nothing, being most interested in her rheumatism, and Isabella insisted that she had seen Dolores last on the evening before in her own room.

"Where is Fray Juan?" asked the Viceroy, and servants went to find him. It was noon before the search resulted in any news, and then the man from whom Fray Juan had bought the horses told of the purchase and described the animals.

"Question the guards about the city," ordered the Viceroy, and men-at-arms scattered in every direction in search of the escaped pair. The sun was setting when word at last came that a priest

and a page had ridden the night before on the road toward Vera Cruz.

"Follow them!" ordered the Viceroy, and a party of men-at-arms saddled their horses and galloped through the gate to disappear along the road that led down to the sea.

* * * * *

"We are in time," said Fray Juan to Dolores, as they rode into Vera Cruz the following Monday morning. "There lies the ship on which you are to sail. But I hope that she sails soon, for it may be that we are followed, and I would not have you taken back. Come, let us go down to the beach."

A small boat was pulled up on the sand, its crew waiting beside it.

"Has the captain gone aboard?" asked Fray Juan of the sailors.

"He is but now on his way," replied one of the men. "This is the captain, coming down the beach."

The man approached, and stopped when he had reached the group beside the boat.

"I have here," said Fray Juan, when he had greeted the sailor, "papers from His Excellency, the Viceroy, bidding you take with you to Spain, Don Pablo Navarro, a ward of His Excellency. The papers are here, together with the passage money. The papers also inform you as to your duty to Don Pablo when you have arrived in Spain.

The need is urgent, and we have ridden hard to catch you."

"Another passenger," replied the Captain, growling. "One would think these ships were fleets, the way we are given passengers. And this one, too, will require a cabin. But then, a sailor must expect such things. Get into the boat, Don Pablo. And is that all your belongings? Well, a saddle bag is enough, if it is enough. But hurry, for we must leave before the wind changes or not leave to-day."

Dolores took Fray Juan's hand in both of hers.

"Farewell, Padre," she said. "I would that you too were going."

"Nay," he replied. "I cannot. My duty lies in Mexico. Farewell."

"Farewell," repeated Dolores, her voice breaking, and turning she clambered into the boat.

The sailors slid the little craft along the sand into the water, and bent their backs to the oars. Smaller and smaller Dolores seemed to Fray Juan as the boat approached the ship, and when at last she stood on the high stern and looked toward the shore she seemed but a speck against the sky.

The anchor was weighed, the sails were raised, and the little ship moved off across the blue waters of the Gulf, as Fray Juan stood gazing after it. Lower and lower the sails sank until at last they were but a tiny patch of white against the blue sky.

A group of horsemen rode down the beach, and drew up beside Fray Juan.

"This is the priest," said one of the men. "I have seen him before."

"Where is the daughter of His Excellency, the Viceroy?" asked the man-at-arms who led the little party.

"There," replied Juan, pointing to the sail that had almost faded over the horizon. "There, aboard that ship, on her way, I hope, to happiness."

CHAPTER XXV

THE anteroom of the palace at Toledo was filled to overflowing on an afternoon early in May a little over three months after Dolores had sailed from Vera Cruz on the ship that bore Francisco. All through the room there was suppressed excitement, and behind more than one fan whispered conversations were in energetic progress.

"Is it true that Francisco Coronado has returned in chains?" queried a cavalier.

"Sh! Not so loud! Don Diego," replied the jeweled lady he had addressed. "I have been told that His Majesty is highly incensed at the whole affair. Francisco loses everything he has at gambling, is sent to New Spain as a kind of Governor, hears stories of some new land that is filled with gold and jewels, urges the Viceroy to give him an army with which to conquer it, and, once he enters the new land, loses the army, finds nothing worth the finding, and returns in rags with only a priest left of the army he took with him. And so he is returned to Spain in order, I suppose, that His Majesty may visit some dire punishment upon him for having failed to find another Mexico as Cortez did, or to do as did Pizarro in the Kingdom of the

Incas. A shame, it seems to me, that such a youth should face the dangers of an unknown land, and then be punished because the Lord made the place a desert and not a treasure house."

She closed her fan with a snap, and looked at Diego for a moment.

"I fear for him," she continued, "but I hope my fears are without reason."

"And I," returned Diego. He bowed and walked away across the crowded room, stopping here and there to chat with cavaliers and ladies, upon whose lips was one subject, and one subject only—Francisco Coronado.

Courtiers came and went through the great doorway, bowing, chatting, and exchanging confidences, and as Diego made his way across the room and back, he gathered little bits of gossip that he could make into a more or less complete story.

Francisco had arrived at Toledo but two days before, under guard, and the officer in whose charge he had been was summoned at once to the King, to whom he told what he knew of the story. He had also given His Majesty a long written report from the Viceroy, but it was from the verbal account that the stories that floated about the palace had come, repeated by a secretary who had been with His Majesty. The officer had also presented a paper from the Viceroy, begging His Majesty to receive one Don Pablo Navarro, a very young and girlish youth, the officer had said, who had come from New

Spain on the same ship as had Francisco. The officer did not know what connection the youth had with the case, but that there was some he felt sure.

All this and many additional stories were being repeated in the anteroom, and many were the questions that were asked concerning the stranger, Don Pablo Navarro. But he had arrived at the palace at dusk two days before, and being caped and jack-booted, little could be said by those who had seen him as to his appearance, save that he was small and apparently little more than a boy. Quarters had been assigned him, and he had sent his lackeys away ere he had consented to remove even so much as his cape, and had only insisted that he be left alone. But early the next morning he had asked the lackey who had come to attend his wants, to accompany him to the shops of the city, that he might make some necessary purchases. And off they had gone, before the palace was well awake, and most of the day they had spent, not in those shops from which men were wont to buy, but in those that were most popular with the ladies of the court. But the lackey who had told that much could tell no more. He knew not what had been bought, and could only say that he had carried many bundles and packages, all of them well wrapped, back to the rooms that had been assigned to Don Pablo, and that, once there, that gentleman had given him two great gold pieces and had told him to be off. The lackey had taken the gentleman's

meals to him, and had seen nothing strange save the hem of a skirt as it was revealed beneath Don Pablo's cape that all but covered it as it hung upon the wall.

And when the gossips tossed this little story about among themselves they winked knowingly.

"There is a sweetheart," they whispered, "for whom he must be making purchases." And they laughed with pleasure at their own insight.

Don Diego crossed and recrossed the anteroom. Then, having gotten all the bits of gossip that were being passed about, and wondering what it all meant, he wandered toward the entrance of the room, and passing through it he walked slowly down the great corridor and into the maze of corridors beyond, pondering the matter.

But, ponder as he would, he could not see but that Francisco's case was more than black enough. He stopped before a window, and stood looking out into the garden where the sinking sun still shone upon the grass, his hands behind his back, his head dropped forward, and a frown upon his face. So standing he failed to hear the rustle of a silken gown as its wearer approached along the corridor. Even when the girl had come almost within an arm's length of him he did not look around. She stopped and for a moment hesitated.

"I crave your pardon," she said softly, and he wheeled about, to stand staring in amazement at the figure before him.

"I am unacquainted here," she continued, her great, black eyes gazing at him from under their curved lashes, her head a little forward, her hands clasped over her bosom. "But I see in you a gentleman of whom, I trust, I may ask a favour."

Diego, recovering from his surprise at the beauty of this unknown girl, bowed low.

"I have been most awkward in my surprise," he said. "I trust that I may be of service, that I may make amends."

"My story is a long one," she began, "and one that will sound strange in your ears. But now there is no time to tell you it. Let it suffice, for the present, for you to know that I am the daughter of Don Antonio de Mendoza, the Viceroy of New Spain.

"My name is Dolores, but I have come from Mexico City masqueraded as a man. The name signed to the papers that I have is Don Pablo Navarro, and I come that I may entreat with His Majesty on behalf of Don Francisco Vasquez de Coronado, who has been sent here, vilely and wrongfully in chains, because it has been thought that he is guilty of gross negligence in losing an expedition of which he was in command."

She paused, and Diego gasped.

"You—" he stammered. "You—Don Pablo Navarro?"

"Yes, I," she replied.

He drew a deep breath.

"Before Francisco left for the New World," he said, "he was a very close friend of mine. I was thinking of him even as you spoke to me, and was wondering how I could be of some assistance to him."

"Good fortune is with me," replied Dolores. "That I might meet someone who had known of Francisco I did not doubt, but to find a friend of his is more than I had dreamed might happen."

"But what are we to do?" asked Diego.

"You might first tell me your name," suggested Dolores, with a smile.

He bowed.

"My surprise has overcome my manners," he replied. "I am called Diego de Guevara."

"Then, Don Diego," said Dolores, "lead me to the council room of His Majesty. For I have been ordered to appear there, and methinks I might even now be keeping His Majesty waiting. That will never do, for I must not anger him, else he may not grant me the favour I hope for."

"I have here the papers that prove me Don Pablo Navarro—" she drew from her bosom the papers forged for her by Fray Juan—"and if you will gain admittance for me to His Majesty, not as Señorita Dolores, the daughter of the Viceroy, but as Don Pablo Navarro, of whom he already knows, I trust that I can do the rest." She clasped her hands and closed her eyes. "I pray to God I can," she whispered.

"Then come, Señorita," said Diego, and together they passed through the length of the corridor and entered the thronged anteroom where the talk was still of Francisco.

As Dolores and Diego entered, the group about the door ceased their chatter and gazed in amazement at the beautiful stranger. As the pair passed down the room the crowd fell away from in front of them, and the talking ceased, being replaced as they passed, by whispered questions. The two approached the door leading to the King's council room, where he had been for an hour or more with his advisors, and Diego, approaching one of the guards, spoke to him in an undertone, so as not to be overheard by those standing near.

"Inform His Majesty's secretary," he ordered, "that Don Pablo Navarro is awaiting in the anteroom."

The guard saluted and disappeared through the door, presently returning.

"His Majesty bids Don Pablo Navarro enter," he announced.

Diego turned to Dolores.

"His Majesty will see you," he said, and those about the pair opened their eyes in amazement as Dolores approached the door, where she was stopped by the halberd of the guard.

"The summons was not for you," he said, gruffly.

"Show him your papers," whispered Diego, step-

ping to her side, and Dolores unrolled the parchment she held in her hand. The guard looked at it.

"The papers mean nothing," he said. "His Majesty has bidden a gentleman to enter. I cannot allow a lady to pass."

"I will answer for it," replied Diego. "Let us pass."

"I fear it will make me trouble," returned the guard.

"To keep His Majesty waiting will make you more," argued Diego. "Let us pass—and quickly. I shall be to blame if His Majesty is displeased."

For a moment the guard hesitated, then lowered his halberd and opened the door.

The King was seated at a table, surrounded by half a dozen councillors and faced by Francisco, who stood dejectedly looking at the circle of serious faces opposite him. He did not look around as Diego and Dolores entered, nor, for a moment, did the King. The light of the late afternoon shone through the leaded windows that were deep set in the oak paneled wall. An arch opposite was hung with heavy curtains that swayed gently as the door to the anteroom closed, and overhead the dark and heavy rafters of the ceiling all but lost themselves in their own shadows.

The serious expression on the King's face was reflected on those around him, and, despite his simple costume, the strength that made of him a

king of kings was plainly to be seen. There could be no doubt in Dolores' mind that there sat Charles the Fifth—King of half the world.

"That is all my story," Francisco was saying as the door opened. "I have no more to tell. But I swear that what I've told is true."

The King turned and saw Dolores, as she stopped with Diego just inside the door. For a moment he said nothing, and then turned to Diego.

"What have we here, Diego?" he asked. "And how is it that you have entered without my permission?"

"Your Majesty has ordered Don Pablo Navarro to appear," replied Diego, bowing, "and the guard at the door would not allow the bearer of that name to enter until I took the responsibility of entering with her. Your Majesty, the daughter of His Excellency Don Antonio de Mendoza has come to Spain as a man, and bearing a man's name. Her papers describe her as Don Pablo Navarro, and this is she."

Francisco had stood without looking at the newcomers until Diego's speech was half finished, and then, half turning, he recognized Dolores. For a moment he stood as if stunned, his lips parted, his eyes wide.

"Dolores!" he cried finally, and springing to her side, dropped on his knee and seized her hand, pressing it to his lips.

For a moment the room was silent, and the King

rose from his chair and leaned across the table, his hands upon the papers that lay in front of him.

"What have we here?" he asked again, and Francisco rose to his feet.

"Your Majesty," he replied, "Don Pablo Navarro has suddenly become Señorita Dolores, the daughter of the Viceroy of New Spain, whom I thought I left behind in Mexico City. On board the ship I seldom was given the privilege of coming on deck, being chained most of the time below. Several times I saw Don Pablo, but sword and cape and jack-boots were an excellent disguise, and never once, until now, did I suspect that it was she."

The King looked curiously at Dolores. She curtsied and returned his gaze.

"Why have you gone to such lengths to come to Spain?" he asked, seating himself and leaning back in his chair, while the councillors who surrounded him shifted their position to relieve the tenseness of their surprise. "And how is it that Mendoza has given you papers making you out to be a man?"

"I have come, Your Majesty," she replied, "to plead for one who has been cruelly and shamefully treated. How difficult it was for me to look on when he appeared on deck, white and weak and weighted down with chains, is more than I can ever tell. But should I have spoken I might have failed to reach Your Majesty, and that is what I set out to do.

"My papers were forged for me by Fray Juan,

who for years had made out many of the official documents that my father was called upon to sign. And it was with his assistance that I left Mexico City, went to Vera Cruz, and sailed upon the ship that brought Francisco.

"Now I am here, and I beg Your Majesty not to believe him guilty of the crime my father blames him with."

For a moment the King toyed with a quill, and then looked up.

"What proof do you bring," he asked, "that the report the Viceroy has written is not true?"

"Proof?" she repeated. "Proof?" She hesitated, her heart in her throat, her knees weak beneath her. "I—have—no—proof," she admitted. "No proof, Your Majesty—save my confidence in him. But, Your Majesty, that is proof enough. I know he is not guilty."

For the space of half a minute no one moved, and the silence in the room bore down as if it were a weight upon Dolores' shoulders. Before her sat the court of last resort. In the power of that one man—and that one man alone—lay all her future happiness and all that she held dearest in the world. But perhaps he would relent and grant her plea. Her mind seethed with a thousand unformed thoughts, a thousand hopeless plans.

"Perhaps!" she thought. "Perhaps! Oh, Madre de Dios, he *must* relent!"

And then, suddenly, she caught herself and

soothed her tortured mind as the King looked up and spoke.

"Señorita," he said, his voice soft and so filled with tenderness that his councillors listened in amazement. "Francisco is as dear to me as if he were my son, and I am as anxious as any father would be to pardon him, or better still to find the guilt not his. Yet I am King, and being King I cannot let my head be governed by my heart.

"I find myself in the thankless position of a judge. In this case, as in others that have come less near my heart, I would that I could quickly grant a pardon. But as King I must see justice done, although as man I fain would be most merciful. But should I fail to punish most severely a crime such as this with which Francisco stands accused, then I would not have done my duty to those men of his who perished in a distant, unknown land.

"If there is evidence to prove that the misfortunes that befell his expedition are not properly to be laid to him, then I promise he shall go free. But so far there is little that favours him. Even he cannot explain away the circumstantial evidence that convicts him. Have you no evidence that will prove him innocent?"

Dolores stood with her hands clasped and her head drooping, her heart pounding. She tried to speak and for a moment could not. Finally she lifted her head.

"I have no evidence, Your Majesty," she said, her voice low and trembling. "I have no evidence save my faith in him."

She stood silent, her lip between her teeth, her eyes dry.

"My daughter," said the King, after a pause, "I, too, have faith in him. Despite the evidence that I have heard against him I cannot in my heart believe. And yet I cannot let my heart dictate my actions. Even he has offered me no proof. He merely tells the story as he told it to your father, and offers nothing—absolutely nothing—to offset the damning evidence arrayed against him.

"But more than once since I've been King I've found that faith in men did not make men of them. There have been men I've trusted who betrayed me. There have been men I've trusted who have proved themselves unworthy of the trust. It seems to me impossible that Francisco should be another one of these, and yet the only word that I have heard that's in his favour is his own. The others, who bring proof, all are against him."

He picked up a parchment that lay before him, and sat for a moment looking at it. Slowly he put it back upon the table, and reaching forward picked up the quill and slowly dipped it in the ink. He held it poised above the parchment, and looked again at Dolores.

"My heart is filled with anguish," he continued,

"as I read this warrant for his death, and yet there is no other way. Sign it I must."

For a moment only the scratching of the quill upon the parchment broke the stillness in the room. Then Dolores, with a moan, collapsed upon the floor.

CHAPTER XXVI

AT ABOUT the time Don Diego met Dolores in the corridor a little cavalcade started up the hill from Toledo toward the palace. The horses were streaked with sweat, and the signs of travel were plain on all the riders. Slowly they traversed the winding road, turning out here and there to pass some nobleman trotting toward the city with a troop of retainers at his back, or breaking the silence to urge their jaded steeds along the way.

A priest was at their head, his gaunt form upright in the saddle, his brow furrowed, his expression serious. He sat silent save for an occasional "Move faster, caballo," as he drove his heels into his horse's ribs.

They rounded a curve in the road, and beheld before them, through the trees, the windows of the palace, through which, here and there, the first lights of evening were beginning to shine.

"At last," muttered the priest. He raised his eyes and crossed himself. "Madre de Dios," he whispered, "do not let me be too late."

He stopped his horse before the palace gate and dismounted, pulling from his saddle bag a roll of papers. He chose one and handed it to the guard.

"Deliver this at once to His Majesty," he ordered. "Do not tarry. It is urgent."

* * * * *

Inside the council room Dolores lay upon a couch, still unconscious, and with Francisco by her side. The door opened and the guard entered, bearing in his hand the paper from the priest.

One of the councillors took it from his hand and opened it. He glanced at it casually, and then more closely. For a moment his hands clutched the paper in surprise and he stepped to the table at which the King still sat, a frown upon his brow, the quill broken in his clenched hand.

"Your Majesty," cried the councillor. "Here—here is evidence," and he dropped the paper on the table before the monarch.

For a moment the room was deathly still, as the King's eyes traveled swiftly along the written lines.

"Bring him in," he cried to the guard who still stood beside the door, and, rising, he strode to the couch on which Dolores lay.

As he approached she opened her eyes and lay quietly, looking at Francisco. The King stopped beside them.

"Courage, my daughter," he said. "Courage, Francisco." He turned to the men who stood beside the table on which lay the signed death warrant.

"Destroy the warrant I have just now signed,"

he said. "New evidence has come from Mexico City. One moment and it will be here."

The door opened ponderously, and the priest entered. He paused as the door closed behind him, and looked about the room. He beheld the King, but paid him no attention, and looking past him saw Francisco and Dolores. Slowly he made the sign of the cross.

"Heaven be praised," he whispered, "I'm not too late."

"You come from Mendoza?" asked the King.

"I do, Your Majesty," replied the priest, "and with papers that reverse the opinion of His Excellency concerning the guilt of Francisco Coronado."

Dolores had not looked at the newcomer, but when she heard his voice she seized Francisco's hand tightly in both of hers.

"Fray Juan," she cried, and raised herself to her feet. "Fray Juan, how come you here?"

"My story is most strange," he replied.

"Then tell it to us," ordered the King, recrossing the room, and seating himself once more in his chair beside the table.

"It is not long," began Fray Juan. "But may I ask what action had been taken by Your Majesty with regard to Francisco and the charges brought against him in the report sent by His Excellency, the Viceroy?"

The King smiled.

"But just before you came," he replied, "I had

signed Francisco's death warrant, basing my action entirely on Mendoza's report and recommendation." He stopped a moment. "It is already destroyed," he continued as he saw the priest's expression change, and leaning toward the desk he picked up the paper Fray Juan had sent in by the guard. "I no longer believe Francisco Coronado guilty of the crime with which I charged him!" That is the way this note from Mendoza reads. More evidence than that I would not ask, but tell us now, your story."

"As Dolores may have told Your Majesty," began the priest, "I took her to Vera Cruz and placed her, in disguise, aboard the ship on which Francisco sailed. But hardly had that ship set sail than soldiers of the Viceroy, who had followed us from Mexico City, arrived and placed me under arrest.

"Immediately I was taken to Mexico City, and there I found that His Excellency had gone through the papers of Señor Gorgoza, who had presented much of the evidence upon which His Excellency had based his decision regarding Francisco. Señor Gorgoza, being dead, could no longer cover up his guilt as he had done for several years, and so it came to light that he had been one of the very greatest villains left unhung. His wealth had been secured by divers dishonest means, and there were papers that proved conclusively that ever since Francisco's arrival in New Spain, Gorgoza had

made constant attempts to ruin his reputation and drive him from the country.

"This did not prove that Francisco was innocent, it is true, but it did prove that Gorgoza was guilty, and that his opposition to Francisco was carried to the very greatest lengths.

"Then it was that I was brought before the Viceroy, and he, conscious that he had been played upon by a villain, was ready to listen to me, whom he had known for many years, and in whom he had confidence. So I was released, and soon had convinced His Excellency that the circumstantial evidence against Francisco was faulty. Furthermore, I had seen everything that Francisco had seen, and could swear to everything that Francisco had told.

"The evidence then turned upon my word and de Alarcon's, each of us insisting that he was right. But finally we reached the conclusion that de Alarcon had not seen the same great cañon that Francisco and I had reported, and so it was that His Excellency was convinced, and hence I have come, as rapidly as ships and horses could make the journey, to save the life of my captain-general and my friend.

"And too, Your Majesty, I've brought all the papers that bear upon the case. And one paper more. It is for Francisco, and is from His Excellency, the Viceroy. May I have Your Majesty's permission to present it to him?"

The King smiled.

"Certainly, Padre," he replied.

The priest drew the paper from the roll he held in his hand, gave it to Francisco, and turned once more to the King.

"And may I suggest," he continued, "that Francisco and Dolores be left to the perusal of the letter while I explain to Your Majesty the import of the documents that bear on this case?"

The King smiled again.

"By all means," he agreed. He turned to his councillors. "I shall not need your services for the present," he said. "Come Padre, to my library. There we can study the documents, in order to make sure that I was not wrong in ordering the warrant destroyed."

The two disappeared behind the hangings that led to the library, and when the curtains had closed behind them the councillors looked at each other in amazement, and silently filed into the anteroom, to tell the story to the gossips of the palace.

In the fading light Francisco and Dolores stood holding the letter from the Viceroy, but the heavy dusk so blurred the words that they could not be deciphered.

"Come, sweetheart, to the window," whispered Francisco. "Let us read your father's message."

"There is no need," she answered, gazing up at him. "I know its import."

"And I," he said, and stooped to kiss her lips.

THE END

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